Working Paper 183

Supporting Livelihoods in Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability: Overview of Conceptual Issues

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This Working Paper forms part of a series that reviews the range of ways in which livelihoods approaches are currently used by operational agencies and researchers working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (SCCPI). The aim of the series is to document current practice so that useful lessons can be learned and applied to ensure for more effective policies, needs assessment, and aid programming to support livelihoods during protracted conflict. Many of these lessons from each of the individual papers are summarised in a synthesis paper. The series also includes an annotated bibliography and a paper outlining the conceptual issues relating to the applications of livelihoods approaches to SCCPI.

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Acknowledgements

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Acronyms

CHAD	Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department
DFID	Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HPD	Health and Population Department (DFID)
HPG	Humanitarian Policy Group (ODI)
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally displaced person
IUDD	Infrastructure and Urban Development Department (DFID)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIPs	Policies, institutions and processes
RNIS	Reports on the Nutrition Situation of Refugees and Displaced Populations
RPEG	Rural Policy and Environment Group (ODI)
SCCPI	Situations of chronic conflict and political instability
SCPI	Situations of chronic political instability
SID	Society for International Development
SL	Sustainable livelihoods
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
URD	Le Groupe Urgence-Réhabilitation-Développement
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

Summary

This paper provides an overview of the development and use of livelihoods approaches in relation to humanitarian responses in areas of chronic conflict and political instability. Current aid practice in situations of chronic conflict and political instability reveals a profound mismatch between the structures and institutions of the international aid regime, and the characteristics and dynamics within countries experiencing chronic conflict and political instability. The overview explores some of the issues that must be addressed in filling this gap between theory and practice. In applying a livelihoods approach to situations of chronic conflict and political instability, the paper emphasises the need to pay adequate attention to aspects relating to political economy.

Situations of chronic conflict and political instability are characterised by a serious crisis of statehood (either at a national or a localised level) and an economy centred on conflict in which entrenched interests benefit from the crisis. These factors are often combined with a high susceptibility to violence, forced displacement, the denial of basic human rights, the deliberate destruction of livelihoods, and the existence of serious poverty. Policies of political conditionality tend to severely limit the channels through which conventional development assistance is delivered, and humanitarian aid (designed to save lives in the face of *temporary* threats to livelihoods) is perceived to be inadequate. The possibility that humanitarian agencies should do more than simply provide basic relief goods in responding to such situations forms the underlying rationale for the application of a livelihoods approach. Over the past decade, the humanitarian agenda has expanded to accommodate aims other than those traditionally associated with humanitarianism, and the paper explores definitions of humanitarian 'crisis', the concept of humanitarian 'need', and some of the institutional, structural and conceptual problems observed by practitioners in this inflation of humanitarian objectives.

The paper traces the historical development of livelihoods approaches and describes the variety of livelihoods principles that have been advanced. The basic elements of a livelihoods framework are presented, highlighting the need for analysis at different levels, for different groups of people, and over time. The very fact that people can and do survive in many situations of chronic conflict and political instability suggests that livelihoods analysis is appropriate in these contexts and can usefully identify opportunities for improved assistance. The paper describes some of the issues that have to be considered when looking at the possibility of using livelihoods approaches to analysis and intervention in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. Among the issues described are the aid channels through which livelihoods support might be delivered and at what level action should be taken; the need for greater understanding of how institutions and structures relate to conflict dynamics; the problematic notion of sustainability; and the importance of adopting a livelihoods analysis that is complementary to a political economy approach. Such complementarity between livelihoods and political economy approaches should make explicit the links between micro and macro, and incorporate an understanding of vulnerability that is based not only on poverty but also on powerlessness. The relevance of right-based approaches is also briefly considered. The paper closes with a summary of key issues for further empirical research.

1 Research Rationale

The poorest people and the poorest countries in the world at the moment are primarily those that can be described as experiencing chronic conflict and political instability. Their poverty is both a cause and effect of political instability. They are countries that have suffered from the combined forces of globalisation and marginalisation; some were left with the legacy of distorted national boundaries and divided polities as a result of colonial rule, and/or of incorporation into a centralised political empire that has disintegrated in the post-Cold War period; many are involved in regional geopolitical machinations and their political landscape is complicated by the mobilisation of ethnic or religious differences.

The provision of aid in contexts of chronic conflict and political instability challenges existing aid structures and institutions in a number of significant ways. The chronic nature of contemporary conflict means that conventional relief responses are inadequate. Relief instruments were designed to save lives in the face of temporary threats to livelihoods (Buchanan-Smith, 2000: 2). While conflicts continue over the long term, there is a major question as to whether and how external assistance might be used more effectively to enable households to secure their basic needs and to maintain public services, such as health and education.

At the same time, the channels through which conventional development assistance is delivered, particularly bilateral channels, remain very limited while the legitimacy of national authority is contested nationally and internationally (Macrae, 1999b). While donor policies invariably include a commitment to poverty eradication, their criteria for development aid often exclude precisely those countries that are the poorest – namely, those experiencing recurrent or continuous violent conflict – because of their policies of political conditionality. Hence, they are limited to providing humanitarian assistance in order to avoid working with national governments that are not internationally recognised as legitimate.

There is thus a profound mismatch between the structures and institutions of the international aid regime, and the characteristics and dynamics within countries experiencing chronic conflict and political instability. The available frameworks for analysis and intervention in both the humanitarian and development paradigms are inappropriate in the context of the 'new wars', and the evolving global order. In particular, traditional assumptions about the state and its role in development, the rights and responsibilities of citizens and states, models for development and economic activity, all require serious reconsideration in the light of chronic conflict and political instability (Leader, 2000: 6).

Donors and operational agencies are struggling with this gap between theory and practice. Their efforts are hampered by the lack of a clear conceptual framework, and real dilemmas about aid relations in these difficult political settings. There is now an impasse in international assistance, such that those in greatest need are also those whom the international aid systems find hardest to reach. The political conditions that create the deepest and most intractable poverty are the same that preclude effective and ethical developmental assistance.

In this context, there is a need to improve understanding both of the particular needs of populations living in these difficult environments, and the constraints they face in maintaining their livelihoods. At the same time, new analysis is required to identify appropriate interventions that can better support livelihoods at the community and population levels.

2 Humanitarian Approaches to Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability

2.1   Descriptions

The terminology 'chronic conflict and political instability' has surfaced recently as a replacement for 'complex political emergencies'. 'Complex emergencies' was the phrase which began to appear in the late 1980s, when many conflicts which were previously associated with the bipolar world order did not cease with the end of the Cold War. The central idea behind the term 'complex emergency' was that these were conflicts with multi-level causation, which resulted in major humanitarian crises (Harvey, 1997: 14). Duffield's definition explains the addition of the term 'political':

> Complex emergencies are essentially political in nature: they are protracted political crises resulting from sectarian or predatory indigenous response to socio-economic stress and marginalisation (1994: 38).

The substitution of the term 'emergencies' with 'chronic conflict' is indicative of the persistent nature of these situations. Acute emergencies may surface now and then, but chronic conflict and political instability can exist without an 'emergency' of the kind that attracts immediate humanitarian attention. Some suggest that the term 'emerging political complexes' is more appropriate even than 'chronic conflict and political instability' (Duffield, 1998: 90), as this acknowledges the fact that these situations are self-contained political systems of a sort, emerging out of the rubble of the former nation state system. The DFID field manager for Relief and Rehabilitation Assistance, for example, stated that some areas, such as Southern Sudan, are in fact very stable, as the situation of conflict seemed (at the time of the interview) unlikely to change in the foreseeable future (Interview, 15/1/01).

No agreed typology has emerged to classify situations of chronic conflict and political instability, but their main characteristics are fairly uncontroversial, and can be applied either at the level of a state or at a more micro level. Situations of chronic conflict and political instability are considered to exist where one or several – but not necessarily all - of the following aspects occur:

- A state in which public institutions (executive, judicial, legislative) are seriously weakened or non-existent

- External legitimacy of the state is withheld or contested

- Strong parallel or extra-legal economy

- Existence of, or high susceptibility to violence

- Forced displacement: refugees and internally displaced people

- Sections of the population are deliberately excluded from enjoying basic rights

- Livelihoods are highly vulnerable to external shocks

- Existence of serious poverty

Situations of chronic conflict and political instability may exist in localised geographical areas within states that might otherwise be considered as stable. Such pockets of insecurity may present many of the same problems for donors and operational agencies working in these areas as those that exist in situations of chronic political instability that are defined at the level of the state. Examples of such localised pockets of conflict and insecurity include the border areas of northern Kenya and

northern Uganda. Some such conflicts (e.g. northern Kenya) are associated with conflicts over natural resources and are further compounded by climatic uncertainties such as drought. There is thus a link between localised pockets of chronic conflict and political instability and environmental factors in which violent conflict over natural resources is combined with livelihood vulnerability, serious poverty, and often a weak state unable to fulfil its responsibilities towards large segments of the population.

However, the serious crisis of statehood, the deliberate nature of the destruction of livelihoods, and an economy centred on conflict in which entrenched interests benefit from the crisis, all suggest that for some purposes chronic conflict and political instability should be considered separately from instability related to environmental hazards. Macrae argues that 'where countries do indeed face multiple environmental, economic and political risks, it is the political dimension of conflict-related emergencies which makes them particularly deadly' (2000: 48). For the purposes of a consideration of livelihoods, we will treat situations of chronic conflict and political instability – whether these exist at a localised, micro level or at the state level – as a category unto itself. The relevance of our conclusions to other chronically unstable situations is a matter for further research.[1]

Although there is not yet a developed typology of situations of chronic conflict and political instability, it is useful to note which characteristics could be employed to distinguish between different situations for the purposes of a livelihoods analysis. The two central characteristics of chronic conflict and political instability identified by most observers as centrally relevant to analysis and intervention are the nature of the state, and the nature of the war economy.

Macrae, following Jackson, uses the term 'quasi-states' to describe these situations in which the state's control over territory is challenged fundamentally, by both lack of resources and institutional failure (2000: 21). Chronic conflict and political instability can exist in 'quasi-states' that are simply very weak or contested, as well as in those in which the term 'collapse' most adequately describes the absence of any functioning state authorities at a national level. Somalia and Liberia would be cases of the latter, while Angola, Sudan and Afghanistan would be cases of the former. Buchanan-Smith notes that the crisis of the state is often characterised by competition over power rather than a vacuum (2000). Harvey adds that local authorities can continue to be powerful even when the authority of the national state has been weakened (1997: 15). The specific nature of the state in these situations is crucial in influencing the livelihood options open to the population, the extent of their vulnerability, and the potential effects of external intervention.

The commonly used term, 'state failure', carries the implication that there were positive intentions to build the state and its institutions, and the problem lies simply in mistakes made in implementation. However, evidence of the way in which certain groups profit from the situation of state crisis suggests that it is not a question of accidental failure, but in some cases, intentional production or sustaining of crisis.[2] This recognition has to be basic to the analysis of situations of chronic conflict and political instability. The tendency of international commentary to consider current intra-state conflicts as 'irrational', caused by prejudice and misunderstanding rather than as rational means to achieve particular ends, makes accurate analysis and response to these conflicts very difficult (Duffield, 1998: 39; Keen, 1997). 'The survival strategies of the politically dominant centre on the displacement and impoverishment of the losers, a key component of today's emergencies' (Duffield, Macrae and Zwi, 1994: 225). Our attention is therefore directed explicitly to the nature and character of the conflicts themselves.

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[1] Some argue that important characteristics of 'natural' and 'man-made' disaster situations overlap with each other, and that the distinction is unhelpful (Christoplos, 2000a). This project has decided to focus on situations of chronic conflict and political instability, without implying that we have resolved the debate definitively.

[2] For variations on this theme in the African context, see Chabal and Daloz (1999); Bayart, Ellis and Hibou (1999).

Carbonnier's review of the literature suggests there is no typology for the analysis of conflict economies (1998: 10), although the World Bank's Post-Conflict Unit and Development Economics Research Group are working on developing such an analysis (Email, P. Cleves, World Bank, 18/12/00). The political economy of war approach directs attention to three primary areas: the war economy, the collateral impacts of war, and economic strategies of war (Le Billon, 2000: 1). Harvey identifies the degree to which warring parties and local authorities predate upon the population as a key distinction between different situations of chronic conflict and political instability (1997: 15).

We will explore these areas further in section 4 for their relevance to a livelihoods approach in situations of chronic conflict and political instability.

2.2 The evolution of aid practice in chronic conflict and political instability

From the late 1980s, at the same time as situations of chronic conflict and political instability were on the increase in areas facing the negative effects of economic globalisation, aid budgets declined rapidly to the lowest levels in recent years because of reduced support in western donor countries for the aid project in general. As a proportion of aid, however, humanitarian relief increased at the expense of development aid because donor's political conditionality precluded giving development aid to states whose international legitimacy is in question, a category into which many countries with intra-state conflicts fall (Buchanan-Smith, 2000: 6). In this context, many development agencies have shifted their operations to take on work in humanitarian emergencies and thus developed dual mandates.[3]

Humanitarian aid has been asked to step into the vacuum left by declining development aid, by making relief assistance more 'developmental'. In the face of long-term crisis situations, donors, agencies and independent commentators have questioned the potential for relief aid to cause more harm than good by creating dependency, distorting local markets and potentially feeding into conflict (de Waal, 1997; Anderson, 1996; Buchanan-Smith, 2000: 8–9). Agencies involved in humanitarian work are also increasingly expected to use their programmes to resolve conflicts because foreign policy interest in these non-strategic areas has declined to the point where donor states are not willing to attempt political solutions themselves (Duffield, 1998; Leader, 2000: 6; Le Billon, 2000: 17).

The first approach by humanitarian agencies to their new mandate was to apply the so-called 'relief to development continuum', which was originally developed for emergencies related to natural disasters (Macrae, 2000: 48). This approach is based on the idea of a linear progression back to normalcy: relief aid is needed to save lives immediately, and then once the crisis is over, rehabilitation of essential productive structures can begin, until conditions have been restored for the resumption of developmental programming.

However, the relief-development continuum has been gradually discredited as an inappropriate conceptual approach in situations of chronic instability, for a number of reasons. First, in these situations there is rarely a distinct 'end' to the emergency (Cliffe and Luckham, 2000: 299), and therefore no clear point at which a transition can be made into rehabilitation and development work (Harvey, Maxwell and Campbell, 1998: 6). Second, the assumption that all parts of a country are at the same point on a continuum was challenged by the emergence of islands of relative peace within countries in which instability also existed (White and Cliffe, 2000). Most importantly, the

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[3] This is not to imply that development agencies took on work in humanitarian emergencies simply as a response to the change in donor budgets. There were many reasons behind the shift, for example the growing incidence of emergencies in previously stable and peaceful environments where they previously had development projects and programmes, because their supporters expected them to do emergency work, fund-raising pressures, etc.

assumption of improving security and diminishing emergency need as aid moves along the continuum has not been upheld by experience (Macrae et al. 1997).

In the place of the relief-development continuum, some agencies have moved on to the concept of 'synergy', or 'developmental relief'. The core expectation of this approach, according to White and Cliffe, is the 'potential for relief/development/peace-building synergies to reduce the need for relief through supporting capacities for coping and recovery and helping to prevent, mitigate and resolve the conflict that causes complex political emergencies, and to sustain peace' (2000: 319). White and Cliffe suggest that 'relief' and 'development' approaches should be differentiated according to their objectives and outcomes rather than the content or 'modalities' of aid (2000: 323). They argue that many different outcomes other than pure relief can be promoted by assistance that is delivered through channels other than the state or discredited local institutions. This approach also raises the issue of the 'grey area' between the concepts of relief, rehabilitation and development, and the blurring of boundaries between them (Harvey, Maxwell and Campbell, 1998).

By contrast, other agencies have retreated from the idea of developmental humanitarian relief on the argument that this compromises their original humanitarian principles and objectives (Leader, 2000). In particular, they have identified fundamental clashes between the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence, and developmental approaches of engagement, conditionality and solidarity (Macrae et al. 1997: 232).

Within this context, the idea of supporting livelihoods is part of approaches that accept the possibility for humanitarian agencies to do more than simply provide basic relief goods. It is based on the argument that even in the midst of conflict, people pursue livelihood strategies other than simply providing food for today or shelter for tonight, and hence such strategies should be supported by assistance provided in these contexts (White and Cliffe, 2000: 325; Macrae et al. 1997: 233; de Waal, 1994: 140). As such, this approach is open to some of the criticisms that have been voiced over the past decade about the transformation of humanitarian assistance – we will look at these issues in more detail in section 4.

2.3   Humanitarian approaches: dominant paradigms

Despite the blurring of boundaries noted above, it is possible to distinguish humanitarian and development approaches to chronic conflict and political instability in a number of ways: by their aims, their guiding principles, their content, their timeframes, and so on. In this section we outline some of the distinguishing features of the dominant humanitarian paradigms, before considering the ways in which these relate to the protection of livelihoods.[4]

A review of agency definitions of humanitarian 'crisis' or 'emergency' reveals a range of approaches with strong common elements. UNHCR describes a humanitarian emergency in the following way:

> 'any situation in which… life or well-being… will be threatened unless immediate and appropriate action is taken, and which demands an extraordinary response and exceptional measures…' (UNHCR, 2002).

The concern with threats to 'life or well-being' sets a potentially broad agenda, though in practice, and given competition for available funds, a *de facto* prioritisation process is characteristic of most humanitarian responses. It is notable that the concern here is with prevention of threats to life or

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[4] For further discussion of the issues discussed here, see Darcy (forthcoming b).

well-being through timely and appropriate action. In practice, a response may not be triggered until such a threat has actually materialised.

For Oxfam GB, a humanitarian crisis is:

> 'any situation in which there is an exceptional and widespread threat to life, health or basic subsistence, that is beyond the coping capacity of individuals and the community' (Oxfam GB, 2002).

This brings in a number of other factors: the idea of extensiveness ('widepread'), a concern with threats to health and subsistence, and the idea of coping capacity. Such a definition points to forms of response that go beyond the relief of symptoms, and that might extend to support to livelihoods and the diversification of coping strategies. The extent to which humanitarian agencies concern themselves with less obviously 'relief' oriented interventions and with the restoration of people's ability to cope for themselves (e.g. through agricultural inputs), is one of the defining characteristics of an agency's approach. Typically, those agencies that have a development agenda will tend to highlight the livelihoods aspects of humanitarian crises.

A feature of both of the definitions cited above is the idea that such situations are exceptional or demand an exceptional response. They represent, in other words, such a significant deviation from the 'norm' as to require a different response. Yet in many situations of chronic conflict and political instability, the situation may remain 'critical' for so long that the norm is in effect re-defined. The danger here is that what would, in other circumstances, be a situation so severe as to demand an exceptional (humanitarian) response, is judged not by any absolute standard but in relation to what has become the norm for that context. The threshold for response, in other words, becomes raised.

A few examples from the literature on famine will illustrate this point. The existence of high malnutrition rates and accompanying mortality rates, as a result of chronic food insecurity and poor health, is not always described as a famine.

- Malnutrition (global, acute) in the drought prone Red Sea State of Sudan has remained above 15% since 1998 and has been increasing annually (Nseluke-Hambayi, 2002)

- Over the last six years in Mandera, Kenya, the rate of malnutrition has remained consistently above 20% even with general ration distribution and exceeds 30% when the general ration distribution ceases.

- Rates of malnutrition in Southern Sudan have exceeded 15% since 1996, even after a good agricultural season (RNIS, 2002).

None of these situations is characterised as a famine. Yet a situation like that currently faced by a number of Southern African states *has* been called famine by some, despite the relative normality of the data on malnutrition. The explanation may lie partly in the willingness (and perceived ability) of international agencies to respond to the situations in question. But it seems that those situations that face chronically high levels of malnutrition, mortality and morbidity, become in some way reclassified. Humanitarian aid is perceived to be inadequate as a response to such situations, as patently failing to deal with underlying causes. Yet none of the existing paradigms for development seem adequate to situations in which there exists a vacuum of state services, widespread political and economic marginalisation, and a breakdown of community support mechanisms. Donors are, in any case, reluctant to put development funding – with its emphasis on partnership – into situations where the existing authorities are seen as unaccountable, ineffectual or potentially abusive. The result may be an inadequate and inconsistent humanitarian response, and no prospect for sustainable development.

Gauging the severity or the extent of threats to life and welfare is problematic. Many of the concepts involved (such as 'numbers affected' and 'vulnerable people') lack any common definition, and tend to lack precision in practice. Various measures and indicators that offer the prospect of greater precision are in common use: 'excess mortality', using measurements of crude and under-fives mortality rates; 'excess morbidity', using a range of health surveillance or assessment techniques; and levels of acute malnutrition. All assume a 'normal' benchmark that may or may not be adjusted to the context. In practice, apart from malnutrition data, such evidence is rarely available or collected on any consistent basis; and where it is, it tends to reflect a historical picture that, in the absence of trend analysis, may be of limited use in gauging current or future threats to life and health.

The concept of 'humanitarian need' (as opposed to risk or threat) is in common usage but is itself problematic. Typically, a 'deficit' model is assumed: the affected population is said to lack some essential commodity, or to lack the conditions necessary for their well being or survival. In some cases, this approach seems natural and appropriate: where, for example, a community has lost its assets in a flood, and where the deficit (loss of shelter, food stocks etc.) is evident. In other cases it makes less obvious sense: how to define the 'need' for health or for protection in these terms? In such case, the use of the concepts of threat, risk and vulnerability – and the need to reduce these – seems better suited to the process of analysis. Even in situations where a deficit model might seem appropriate – where, for example, a population lacks access to sufficient food – it can be misleading. Too often, such situations are analysed simply as 'food deficits' to which the appropriate response is food aid. This is an example of a commodity-based approach to relief intervention that defines 'humanitarian need' as the need for certain forms of relief. Beneficiary consultation is not always a feature of such approaches.

Any analysis of the threats to life and welfare of populations caught up in chronic conflict and political instability must take account of the threats of violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation that people face – whether as a by-product of war or as part of the strategy of the warring parties. Apart from being matters of direct humanitarian concern, such threats – especially that of forced displacement – are often the cause of the need for relief assistance. As humanitarian agencies have, since the end of the Cold War, increasingly engaged directly in conflict situations, they have been forced to confront the issue of protection as essential to the humanitarian enterprise. Yet their ability to protect the populations concerned is questionable, and can perhaps only be understood in terms of their ability to influence the policies and practices of the belligerents.

The protection role of humanitarian agencies is a matter of active debate in the sector – including that of the formally mandated protection agencies (the ICRC and UNHCR). Agencies increasingly invoke the relevant legal frameworks of international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law. This can be seen as part of a broader move towards identifying responsibilities and holding responsible the relevant parties. The Sphere Humanitarian Charter explicitly states the humanitarian agencies' role and responsibilities to be secondary to that of the primary actors, defined in human rights terms: the individual and the state. Seen in this way, the role of humanitarian agencies can be seen to be as much concerned with the functioning of that relationship between state (or warring faction) and individual, as with the direct provision of services. Yet attempting to mediate that relationship may be difficult or impossible. It may also be dangerous. Agencies are being forced to reappraise the practice of neutrality as a humanitarian principle: to the extent they are concerned to point out abuses of human rights, their ability to maintain the perception of neutrality – and hence, in practice, ensure their security and continued access – may be compromised.

A feature of the past decade is the extent to which the humanitarian agenda has expanded to accommodate aims other than those traditionally associated with humanitarianism. This has

sometimes included the 'political' aims of conflict reduction and peace building that, in practice, are not necessarily compatible with the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence of action. More generally, there have been attempts to put into the humanitarian basket objectives which the system has no means of fulfilling – even if it were desirable they should adopt such a role. The multi-donor evaluation of the response to the Rwanda crisis exposed the dangers of expecting humanitarian agencies to fill a vacuum of political action (see Borton, 1996) – something that the Bosnian conflict had also highlighted. The tendency on the part of donors to see humanitarian aid as part of a broader foreign policy agenda has brought with it obvious dangers of compromise for humanitarian agencies (Macrae and Leader, 2000).

Another area of 'inflation' of humanitarian objectives has been in the attempt to fulfil developmental goals through humanitarian action. We examine below some of the problems inherent in this attempt, not least the incompatibility of development principles such as sustainability, partnership, capacity-building and empowerment with the traditional modes of humanitarian action, and with the principles that govern it. The demands of operational neutrality, and of the injunction to 'do no harm', raise difficult questions for any approach to working in conflict zones that prioritises partnership or the investment of resources.

2.4   Current agency practices[5]

Evidence from interviews and documents suggests that the current climate is characterised by a considerable amount of reflection and change by agencies as well as donors, in responding to criticisms and evaluations of agency practice, operations, as well as to conceptual debates. However, there are institutional, structural and conceptual constraints to this endeavour. Agencies are often aware of these constraints and are attempting to overcome them or work around them as best they can.

While each agency and donor has its own approach, objectives, strengths and weaknesses, there are similarities between them. With respect to humanitarian activity in situations of chronic instability, Leader has divided agencies into three principal groups (2000: 19–20):

- Those who have elevated the principle of neutrality as an absolute in order to promote the rights of non-combatants, rather than trying to promote a particular outcome of war;

- Those who have abandoned the principle of neutrality in favour of explicit political engagement to resolve conflict itself;

- 'Third-way' humanitarians who have neither elevated nor abandoned neutrality, who promote a 'developmental relief' approach, but who often depoliticise central concepts in humanitarian aid.

Leader suggests that donor states are also widely varied in their approaches, and the neat distinction between states' foreign policy interests and their role as donors of humanitarian aid masks considerable complexity (2000: 21).

Evidence of current agency thinking collected in preparation of this overview suggests that complexity is an appropriate adjective to describe the overall picture of agencies' rhetoric, approaches and practice. Even branches of the same organisation took different positions on some issues. However, most of the agencies interviewed for this project fall into Leader's third category, namely pursuing 'developmental relief', capacity building, and arguing for the role of humanitarian aid in dealing with root causes and conflict resolution (2000: 20).

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[5] This section is based on work done by Helen Sida, both interviews and analysis.

Interviewees included individuals with both humanitarian and developmental perspectives. They were candid in admitting areas in which policy is lagging behind practice, and areas in which practice fails to conform to policy, identifying a variety of reasons for the disjuncture. Many agreed that lack of clear, widely accepted theoretical frameworks for these situations of chronic conflict and political instability was an obstacle for their work, but most pointed to operational and structural constraints which they perceived as more central. Those coming from more of a humanitarian perspective tended to be more practically focused and concerned with issues relating to access, security, and staff recruitment.

Some agencies admitted they did not have an officially agreed approach to working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. While for some this was a problem that needs to be resolved, others believed that it was appropriate to apply the same approach to development in situations of chronic instability as in other more stable situations. One informant suggested that this was because of important similarities between situations of chronic instability and other poverty contexts, for example urban slums in countries with chronic poverty. Another advanced the controversial idea that many of these situations characterised as experiencing 'chronic instability' were actually stable, in that the political and economic situation, despite being highly contested, was unlikely to change much in the foreseeable future.

Those agencies that do have an explicit approach to working in emergencies and/or chronically unstable situations primarily focus at the household level; for example, CARE's Household Livelihood Security, Save the Children's Household Economy Approach. These approaches generally focus on assets and vulnerability, although they do not necessarily attempt to increase assets, but may simply aim to protect assets from being depleted. ActionAid attempts to analyse vulnerability at the village, district and national levels as well as household level. DFID's approach to food security is also changing from large-scale infrastructural programmes of food for work, to small-scale grants to individuals to rehabilitate their own houses and fields, and safety nets while they produce the first crop.

Distinct from the direct implementation agencies, Christian Aid works entirely through local partners, including during situations of conflict. They aim to continue previous programmes with those who are not affected by conflict as well as extending to reach those who are affected.

At the same time, agencies are widely moving into the area of peace building and conflict resolution, which takes them beyond the realm of the household and also raises questions as to whether this is compatible with humanitarian principles. Approaches to peace building focus on promotion of civil society and local capacity building. There is, however, recognition that it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of this type of project, and that it is an unpredictable area of work.

Most agencies have taken on board criticisms suggesting that classifying entire countries as 'emergency' is inappropriate, and therefore aim to apply different approaches in areas depending on whether there are 'opportunities' for programming other than relief delivery. Area-based approaches in this sense combine geographical definitions with socio-political ones, as compared with ecological zones as defined by CARE's Household Livelihood Security approach.[6]

Some, though not all, agencies have identified 'bottom lines', criteria for involvement or for determining which approach to pursue in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. CARE has developed its 'guidelines for chronically vulnerable areas' and includes clear 'bottom lines' as well as exit strategies as a requirement for operation (1999); DFID has guidelines for humanitarian practice, though not for 'what comes next' (Interview, 14/12/00); the European

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[6] See Appendix 1 for summary of agencies' approaches.

Commission has identified minimal conditions for different points on the continuum (including the 'grey areas' which it recognises compromise the idea of a clear division between points on the continuum) (EC, 1999); and principles or codes of conduct have been adopted by consortia of agencies working in particular areas of instability, for example the Joint Policy of Operation and the Principles and Protocols of Humanitarian Operation in Liberia, and the Agreement on Ground Rules in South Sudan (see Atkinson and Leader, 2000 on the former; and Bradbury et al. 2000 on the latter).

Although there are conditions under which agencies would cease to operate, many agencies also attempt to maintain a long-term presence in order to permit disaster preparedness and mitigation and build a strong base of local understanding, speaking of 'winding up or winding down' programmes as necessary. One informant stated that the agency needed to take into account the opportunity costs of abandoning or reducing programmes in making decisions as to whether or not to operate.

A number of problems relating to working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability were identified by the agencies and individuals interviewed, and these are presented below, grouped in terms of theoretical, structural, organisational, and operation problems. This categorisation was made by the author, not by the interviewees. Amongst the theoretical problems identified as obstacles to work in situations of chronic instability, agencies suggested that:

- The lack of models of how economies (both those that are directly related to the war and those that are not) function in unstable situations is a serious impediment;

- Models for identifying who gains and who loses in conflict are not sufficiently well developed analytically and cannot easily be put into practice;

- One individual suggested that rehabilitation is an inappropriate concept, as it is something one 'does to things' rather than with people;

- Many intervention models that seek to promote self-reliance do not take sufficient account of structural constraints (for example, seeds and tools distribution does not take account of problems of access to land);

- There are officially accepted guidelines for humanitarian assistance (e.g. SPHERE Guidelines, and DFID's in-house guidelines) but no guidelines for 'what comes next';

- Approaches based on geographical or even geopolitical divisions do not take sufficient account of interconnected patterns of livelihood strategies and the relationship between the political economy of different geographical areas;

- Focus on political divisions also does not take into account varying or persistent need for humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian crises can occur even in areas of political stability, but this is not taken into account in conceptual models that divide approaches on the basis of politics rather than need;

- Gender issues are not sufficiently integrated into current models.

Structural, organisational, operational and problems were on the whole considered the most significant constraints to working in situations of chronic instability. All three of these types of problems were found at both agency level and at recipient country level.
Structural problems highlighted by agencies and donors were[7]:

- Lack of state and non-state institutions with whom to work in situations of political instability because of legitimacy concerns;

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[7] Some of the following are contradictory, as they were advanced by different people/organisations.

- Non-governmental agencies are reluctant to pursue strategies such as cash distribution to increase household income because – assuming that cash distribution requires less staff inputs – this might prove their extensive development programmes and large budgets are not needed (according to one donor);

- Non-governmental organisations might be interested in the idea of giving cash but donors inevitably offer food (according to one individual within an NGO, referring to WFP, among others);

- Theory and practice of humanitarian assistance approaches do not match up (i.e. what agencies would like to do is rarely the same as what they actually do) because of structural constraints relating to the political economy of aid bureaucracy (e.g. funding constraints, difficulties in getting good staff, etc.);

- Funding is a serious constraint for pursuing developmental programming in situations of chronic emergencies, because donor budgets are strongly separated for 'relief' and 'development';

- Hence, donor operations make the relief-to-development continuum idea stick; many potentially worthy approaches in the 'grey area' are overlooked;

- Budgets and timelines are very short term for relief work, thus difficult to plan and maintain consistent programming;

- Two individuals remarked that working with the poorest of the poor is difficult because they often have nothing left to lose and hence are not technically 'vulnerable' to loss. Despite commitment to poverty eradication, agencies have to work with people above the poorest, who are more vulnerable to losses and therefore feel it is worth taking the risk of trying something new in order to decrease vulnerability;

- Promoting non-violent livelihood strategies for sections of a society as an alternative to conflict strategies may not work because of an unfavourable macro-economic context. Macro-level issues tend not to be addressed by programmes focusing on livelihoods;

- Agencies operating in situations of chronic instability have to be wary of speaking out against governance problems because they might be kicked out of the country. On the other hand, they see that much of the problem comes down to good governance as well as poverty and vulnerability.

Organisational problems highlighted were:

- Agencies may switch too rapidly from development programming to relief without considering which should be maintained, because of the functional division of organisations. In practice, there is often a need for both relief and development programming, but in organisations which have separate departments for relief and development it is difficult to implement both simultaneously;

- Official agency policies do not get translated into reality on the ground, because of lack of awareness, lack of time, and other organisational constraints (and sometimes also other organisational priorities) which come before policy;

- Departments (i.e. those dealing with development, emergency and policy) within donor agencies are often not 'joined up' in their work and thinking;

- Structure of promotions and incentives within organisations means that the most experienced staff, of 'highest quality', are rarely those working in situations of chronic instability;

- Staff working in conflict situations usually have logistics background rather than programming experience.

Operational constraints were repeatedly mentioned as crucial, such as:

- Security and access to beneficiaries;

- How to access the poorest people, 'who speaks for whom' (also a structural issue);

- For NGOs: difficulty in finding capable local organisations with which to work, lack of local implementation capacity;

- For donors: one individual expressed a lack of NGO implementing partners for UN agencies to work through;

- Difficulties in accessing the materials and equipment necessary for project implementation because of lack of infrastructure and insecurity;

- Lack of sufficient funding to respond quickly and appropriately in some situations (related to declining aid budgets);

- Quality staff at short notice difficult to secure;

- Political economy approaches require high quality of information, but high quality information is often difficult to obtain in situations of conflict and political instability and partly depends on the capacity of the field staff collecting it;

- Differing approaches of partner organisations sometimes hard to reconcile with agency approach;

- Insufficient time for quality information gathering and preparing good programmes.

3 Livelihoods Approaches

3.1   Background

The concept of livelihoods became prominent in the mid-1980s with work by Robert Chambers and the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. Chambers was critical of the top-down, 'core-periphery' direction of research and practice in development, and proposed a complete reversal of approach to offset outsiders' 'unavoidable paternalism':

> [S]tarting with the priorities and strategies of the rural poor themselves, noting that though some are 'foxes' with a varied repertoire of petty activities and others 'hedgehogs' locked into one relationship, all share the aim of a secure and decent livelihood (1983: 140).

In a sense, focus on livelihoods can be seen as an 'anti-development' strategy. Development theory as it had evolved in the period after the Second World War until the late 1970s had always been centrally about strategies for economies at the national state level, although there was significant debate about which strategy was appropriate. However, by the early 1980s, the idea of a national development strategy itself was challenged in the context of the penetration of borders by international capital that could not be controlled by states (Leys, 1996). Further, many argued that previous national development strategies failed primarily because of inadequacies of the state itself.

One response to these conditions was to see the solutions to 'development problems' as arising out of the market rather than the state. On this view, developing countries would benefit from liberalisation as long as they 'adjusted' their economies to fit the model.

Others argued that if there were theoretical and practical impediments to pursuing development strategies through the state, development would have to start with individuals, their circumstances, assets and strategies instead. For Chambers, the livelihoods approach and increased participation of the poor were means of correcting the inevitable biases introduced by outsiders deciding what was best for poor people. As Johnson put it, 'If actions from above cannot "get it right" (or may not necessarily intend to "get it right" for the rural poor), it is tempting to think that actions "from below" may have a chance – that the rural poor know what their problems are and seek rational solutions to them' (1992: 274).

Chambers was not alone in perceiving a need for an entirely new approach to development. Other theorists detected a serious impasse in critical development theory by the mid-1980s and questioned the entire notion of a universal theory of development (Leys, 1996: 27). The argument followed that a new theory would perhaps arise from the 'micro' and 'meso' levels (Schuurman, 1993). The growing body of field research in development studies as well as in social and economic history in developing countries supported the idea that reality was composed of a great diversity of ways of living, complex and locally specific social relations. Much of this empirical research thus challenged previous theoretical over-simplifications (Leys, 1996: 27), for example the reduction of a wide variety of social relations to class relations.

It is in this context that livelihoods approaches have gained ascendancy in the development community. At the same time as real world conditions made focus on strategies for national development irrelevant, empirical research suggested that reality at the ground level was too varied and locally specific to make universal generalisations useful – or at least not any of the theories that came before.

Livelihoods approaches have become increasingly common over the last decade in academic analysis and non-governmental agency practice. At the same time, the concept of 'sustainable development' gained ascendancy in international circles. It was a small step to bring the two together, in the concept of 'sustainable livelihoods'. The World Commission on Environment and Development used the idea of sustainable livelihoods to encapsulate the various objectives promoted under the banner of human development. This was further concretised in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, with the incorporation of sustainable livelihoods into Agenda 21 (Goldman, 2000a).

The idea of 'sustainable livelihoods' as a core objective for development has now entered the mainstream. The British government's Department for International Development has adopted it, as has the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).[8] A wide range of NGOs has also taken on the objective of promotion of sustainable livelihoods, for example CARE and Oxfam, and the Society for International Development (SID), which includes both northern and southern non-governmental and grassroots organisations. DFID sees the promotion of sustainable livelihoods as a means to achieve the over-riding objective of poverty elimination to which the current government committed itself in the 1997 'White Paper on International Development'.

The important point that emerges from this discussion is that livelihoods approaches, by beginning with poor people themselves, fit neatly into a world in which states are generally not capable of implementing a developmental agenda owing to the erosion of their powers, or because of ideologies (both neo-liberal and neo-populist) which see states as inappropriate channels for development.

3.2   What is a livelihoods approach?

At its most basic, a 'livelihoods approach' is simply one that takes as its starting point the actual livelihood strategies of people. Instead of starting with a grand theory, it looks at 'where people are, what they have and what their needs and interests are' (Chambers, 1988a: 1), and any generalisations follow from the particular.

The concept of livelihoods was directly opposed to the traditional economic focus of development on income and employment,[9] because neither of those concepts accurately captured the elements upon which poor people build their lives.

Income or production-based measures of poverty were perceived as inadequate because level of income or production alone cannot tell us whether people are able to secure a livelihood and achieve their goals. Sen illustrates this point with respect to famines: he argued that it was not a question of an insufficient quantity of food in general which led to mass starvation, but a lack of entitlement on the part of individuals to the food which existed (Sen, 1981; Drèze and Sen, 1989). Chambers and Conway capture the issue of entitlements in the notion of access: 'access is the opportunity *in practice* to use a resource, store or service or to obtain information, material, technology, employment, food or income' (1992: 11, emphasis added). The DFID sustainable livelihoods framework links the notion of access to assets, and to the 'transforming structures and

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[8] Chambers, writing in 1995, decried the persistence of simplified income and employment foci for development, and suggested that the concept of sustainable livelihoods was unlikely to 'even ripple the mainstream' (1995: 11). By 2001, however, the Society for International Development suggested that the idea of putting poor people at the centre of development approaches was becoming accepted by the major international development actors, such as the UNDP, and the OECD Development Assistance Committee (SID, n/d).

[9] Sen notes the rise of the income-focus of economics in the twentieth century, since earlier economists (or philosophers as they often saw themselves) such as William Petty, Adam Smith, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill were more holistic in their linking of economics and social well-being (see Sen 1999: 289).

processes' which determine access to assets (Carney, 1998). The DFID framework sees access as both determining (use of) assets as well as potentially being influenced by that use.

A second problem with the income focus of development strategies was that income was not always, if ever, top of the list of priorities cited by poor people themselves as the goal of their livelihood activities:

> There is also the quality of living and experience – the value people set on the familiar, on being needed, on a purpose and role in life, on love, on religious observations, on dancing and song, festivals and ceremonies, on things in their seasons, and bringing in the harvest (Chambers, 1983: 146).

This emphasis on the quality of life resonates with the work of economists and philosophers such as Sen and Nussbaum, who also challenged the traditional economic focus on wealth rather than well being (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum and Sen, 1993; Nussbaum and Glover, 1995). They directed attention to the myriad variety of things which people have reason to value, and the fact that income is generally valued as instrumentally, rather than inherently, good.

The DFID sustainable livelihoods framework attempts to capture these issues in the notion of 'livelihood outcomes', that is, the goals that people are trying to achieve through their livelihood pursuits. They include 'more income' as one of the potential livelihood outcomes, along with 'increased well-being', 'reduced vulnerability', 'improved food security' and 'more sustainable use of natural resource base' (DFID, 1999, Section 2.1) – however, they also stress the importance of allowing people to define their own priorities. The emphasis is placed on both increasing the means people require for achieving their livelihood outcomes, and on developing a policy environment that supports people's chosen livelihood strategies.

Chambers and others who advocate a livelihoods approach to development thus perceive it not simply as an improved method of eradicating poverty. They see it as an intrinsically better way of doing development because of the value placed on the exercise of positive freedom involved in the definition of desired livelihood outcomes and choice of livelihood activities.[10] Chambers speaks of a 'moral imperative' as well as a practical one underlying the approach (1988a).

Those who advocate a livelihoods approach have advanced a variety of other principles. In particular, the principle of sustainability has gained ascendancy to the extent that the phrase 'sustainable livelihoods' is now much more generally used than 'livelihoods' on its own. The addition of the term 'sustainability' directs attention not simply to what each individual is doing to gain a livelihood, but the extent to which individual livelihoods and livelihoods in the aggregate affect the ability of other people to achieve their own livelihoods, both now and in the future. Chambers sees sustainability as both a descriptive and a normative concept; that is, we can analyse a livelihood to see how sustainable it is by judging the 'net-SL intensity', but we also take the concept of sustainability as a goal alongside the 'people first' principle (see section 4.3 for further discussion of sustainability).

Chambers and Conway advance three principles, which are seen as both ends and means, though they admit the identification of any principles by outsiders is 'implicit[ly] paternalis[t]' (1992: 4):

> Capability, equity and sustainability are 'our' concepts, not 'theirs'. They are justified only as a stage in a constant struggle of questioning, doubt, dialogue and self-criticism, in which we try to see what is right and practicable, and what fits 'their' conditions and priorities, and those of humankind as a whole.

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[10] Sen emphasises freedom as a constitutive element of development, while Chambers uses 'people first' terminology to capture similar ideas.

Scoones identifies five 'key elements' that are principles or objectives of sustainable livelihoods (1998: 5–7):

1. Creation of working days

2. Poverty reduction

3. Well-being and capabilities

4. Livelihood adaptation, vulnerability and resilience

5. Natural resource base sustainability

DFID distinguishes between its 'core sustainable livelihood principles', and its sustainable livelihoods framework. The framework is a tool for analysis of livelihoods, but on its own will not necessarily 'enhance development activity' (Ashley and Carney, 1999: 8), nor is it intended as the only instrument for poverty elimination (see Figure 1 for the framework). The principles can be applied to any situation, with or without the framework as an analytical tool. The six principles they list are:

1. People-centred

2. Responsive and participatory

3. Multi-level

4. Conducted in partnership with both public and private sector

5. Sustainable

6. Dynamic

Goldman adds two more to this list: 'holistic', and 'builds on peoples' strengths and addresses vulnerabilities' (2000b: 6).

There is some confusion arising from multiple uses of the term 'livelihoods' or 'sustainable livelihoods' as principles and as a tool for analysis. In this paper, we will distinguish between the two by using 'livelihoods approaches' to refer to the principles and objectives, and 'livelihoods framework/analysis' to refer to the various livelihood models proposed as tools for analysis.

3.3 Livelihoods frameworks as tools for analysis

The idea of a livelihoods framework as a tool for analysis is simply to capture the main elements which comprise the complex livelihoods of people at a given point in time, and ideally the trajectory and dynamics of change in livelihoods as well. The basic elements of most livelihoods frameworks are:

1. Livelihood resources: What people have, variously referred to as stocks and stores, assets, and capital (both tangible and intangible);

2. Livelihood strategies: What people do (e.g. agriculture, wage labour, migration);

3. Livelihood outcomes: What goals they are pursuing, the 'living' that results from their activities.

There are a variety of models proposed to link these elements and develop the detail of each. Most models also draw attention to the context in which livelihoods are being pursued, and the policies and processes at all levels, which affect livelihoods at the micro level.

One of the most comprehensive models is that developed by DFID:

Figure 1 DFID's Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
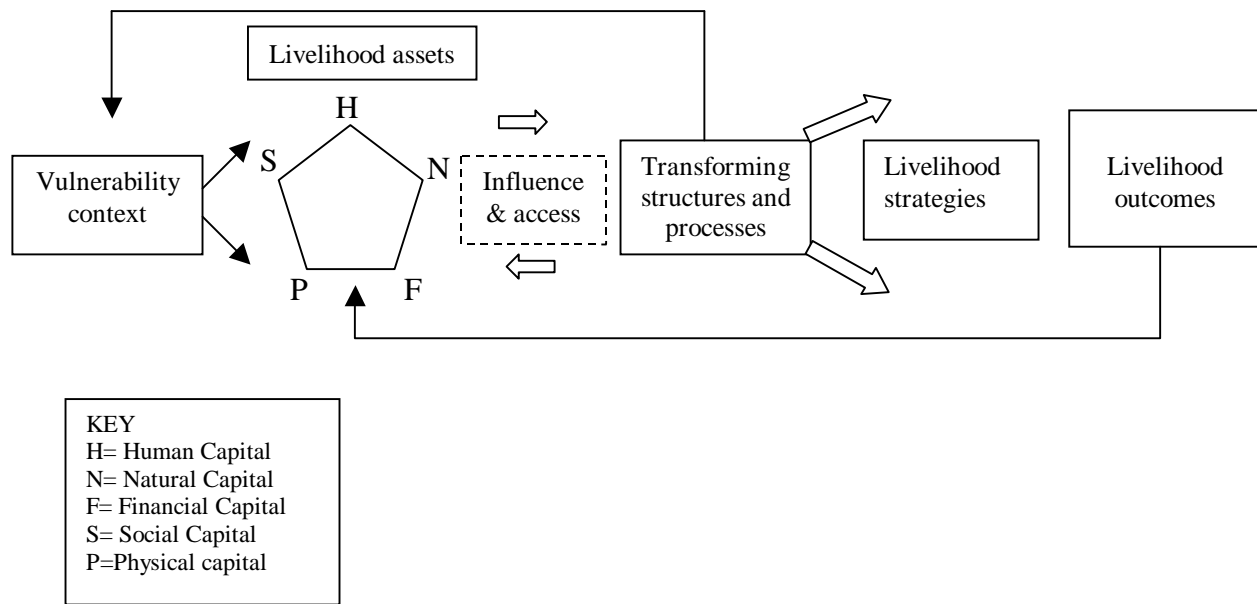
Source: DFID (1999) NB: more recently the 'Transforming Structures and Processes' has been changed to 'Policies, Institutions and Processes' (see section 4.1 and www.livelihoods.org).

UNDP adds political capital to the list of assets, and CARE removes natural resources and infrastructure from the list, locating these elements as part of the context instead (Goldman, 2000a; Carney et al., 1999). Goldman sees the sustainable livelihoods framework as unique in that it puts emphasis on the links between micro and macro levels – although he argues that the DFID framework does not make sufficiently clear how to use this in practice, and he proposes his own methods for rectifying the problem (Goldman, 2000b).

A few important things to note that do not appear in the model, in part because it is two-dimensional:

1. Livelihoods analysis should be done at a variety of levels, in order to capture all of the relevant information.

2. Livelihoods analysis should be done for different groups of people, since there are great differences between strata of the population – but even within strata, there is variation in livelihood strategies that needs to be taken into account. Analysis at the household level risks obscuring internal differentiation.

3. To capture the dynamics of change, livelihoods analysis should be done over time, to capture the trends and directions of movement.[11]

Scoones notes that there is 'no neat, simple algorithm for objectively measuring sustainable livelihoods' (1998: 7), and similarly Chambers and Conway state that 'sustainable livelihoods have many dimensions and multiple causality. […] They are not easy to measure or estimate' (1992: 25). But each of these authors suggests indicators and aggregation methods for analysis, depending on the purpose of analysis. DFID is also modest about the comprehensiveness of its framework: 'like all frameworks, it is a simplification; the full diversity and richness of livelihoods can be understood only by qualitative and participatory analysis at a local level' (DFID, 1999, Section 1.1).

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[11] This does not necessarily imply a longitudinal study, as it is possible to analyse the past on the basis of data available in the present.

The wide-ranging nature of the framework, including as it does everything from the farmer's cow to macro-climatic trends and the national constitution, suggests that an overwhelming quantity of information is required for any analysis. DFID suggests a method for avoiding excessive collection of information, by beginning broadly and shallowly to identify the major areas of importance, and then depending on the purpose, specifying an appropriate level of detail from there.

DFID recommends a long list of potential methodological tools to implement the analysis, such as rapid and participatory methods, gender analysis, governance assessment, institutional appraisal, macro-economic analysis, market analysis, strategic conflict assessment, environmental checklists, etc. (DFID, 1999, Section 4).

4 Livelihoods Approaches in Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability

As previously noted (section 2.2), the idea of focusing on livelihoods in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (and in development practice more widely) has arisen in part because of the problems experienced in working through the state. A further motive for examining livelihoods approaches as a basis for working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (as in other circumstances) is that livelihoods frameworks for analysis have the potential to provide a more sound analytical basis on which to ground interventions, given the problems associated with simple focus on the delivery of relief goods in response to immediate life-saving needs. Much evidence shows that local coping strategies are the most important component in people's survival in many crisis situations (de Waal, 1994: 140), and livelihoods analysis should highlight the ways in which this occurs in order to identify opportunities for improved assistance. The literature on sustainable livelihoods distinguishes between 'coping', which involves temporary adjustments to livelihoods in the face of change, and 'adaptation', which involves a longer term shift in livelihood strategies (Scoones, 1998).

There is a range of issues that have to be considered when looking at the possibility of using livelihoods approaches to analysis and intervention in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. Some of these issues are relevant to other contexts as well, while others are specific to a consideration of livelihoods approaches under conditions of political instability. The following sections will lay out some of these issues and current debates, as an initial step in the research process. The objective of the discussion is to identify key issues for empirical research, rather than to resolve these issues on the basis of armchair reflection alone.

The following sections are ordered loosely in accordance with the importance attached to each issue, but there are linkages between them that defy such an ordering, and the hierarchy is not rigid. Some sections focus more on livelihoods frameworks for analysis, others on the general principles involved in livelihoods approaches, and others look at both. There is a certain amount of repetition between the sections, which is unavoidable given the overlap of issues.

4.1 Aid channels and livelihoods approaches

While states may be weak, inept or corrupt in countries not experiencing conflict, the extreme nature of the failure of the state to ensure the basic rights of the citizenry in situations of chronic conflict and political instability makes the institutional question a central issue for any approach to working in these situations (see section 2.1). It is tempting to see livelihoods approaches as providing a 'way out' from the dilemma of working with state structures, by beginning instead with people themselves.

White and Cliffe argue that aid serving purposes other than pure relief can be delivered through channels other than discredited governments (2000: 324). Thus, just as states have been eroded, so the constitutional link between development aid and state legitimacy can also be broken. In fact, such a process has been going on for more than a decade, with the widespread promotion of structural adjustment policies and the increased practice of channelling of official aid through non-governmental organisations rather than United Nations agencies or bilaterally from government to government (Hanlon, 1991).

Channelling aid through NGOs has its negative side, however. Many criticise this practice as contributing to the demise of the state (Christoplos, 2000a; Hanlon, 1996), and the rise of a contract

culture amongst non-governmental organisations that diminishes accountability to citizens (Hulme and Edwards, 1997). Macrae states that 'where aid is delivered outside the state there is no authority to direct macro-level policy on a range of issues from the design of health systems through to the macro-economic framework' (1999a: 19). At best, this can result in a lack of coordination and coherent planning, resulting in inefficient programming (de Waal, 1994: 151) – in a situation in which resources are scarce, such wastefulness is not easy to overlook. At worst, it can mean that macro-level policy is directly undermining of local level initiatives to support livelihoods. And of course, using external agencies compromises the attempt to make assistance sustainable in an institutional sense (see below).

Is there a third way which neither relies on illegitimate institutions nor on international non-governmental organisations that are not accountable to local populations? The Society for International Development believes that sustainable livelihoods provides the alternative; they argue that more just global structures will evolve from the ground up if we direct our energies towards sustainable livelihoods at the grassroots level. De Waal's description of the way in which indigenous initiatives were primarily responsible for relief efforts in Somalia (1994) suggests that this is not such an unlikely possibility, even in situations of chronic conflict and political instability such as Somalia. (However, it is clearly important to understand the link between 'indigenous initiatives' and conflict dynamics. See section 4.6.)

Some livelihoods frameworks, such as the DFID framework (see Carney, 1998), have been criticised for giving insufficient detail of 'transforming structures and processes' (Ashley and Carney, 1999). Recent attention to this aspect has led to the introduction of the phrase 'policies, institutions and processes' to replace the more nebulous 'transforming structures and processes'. There has since been much more work done on issues of governance in relation to sustainable livelihoods (see Newell, 2000; Manor, 2000; Goldman, 2000a, 2000b; Hobley, 2000).

One suggestion surfacing recently is that paying attention to processes, rather than simply policy outcomes, opens another entry point for livelihoods work: empowering people to play a greater role in the process of determining policy (DFID, 2000b: 15). This is part of a strategy that sees institution building as an objective of livelihoods approaches, rather than simply an external, distant factor influencing assets.

Most current livelihoods approaches, although making local level livelihoods the starting point for analysis, recognise that livelihoods are inter-related with policies and practices at other levels. The livelihoods approach is simply a strategy for starting at the bottom and working up, rather than starting at the top and working down, but it does not deny the need for action at levels other than the local. Emphasis on holism in livelihoods approaches makes this explicit. Nonetheless, livelihoods approaches do not make extravagant claims about their capacity to bring about the necessary policy and institutional changes needed, although they may help to identify them. 'The challenge of addressing inequality, conflicting socio-economic interests or lack of implementation capacity remain enormous, with or without SL. A range of other skills in governance, institutional reform, conflict resolution, capacity building and negotiation are certainly needed' (Ashley and Carney, 1999: 20–2).

4.2   Institutions and structures

Analysts working with the sustainable livelihoods approach have recently turned their attention to the 'policies, institutions and processes' (PIPs) within the DFID proposed framework, correcting earlier biases towards focus on assets and capabilities. One of the issues arising from this analysis

of PIPs is the distinction between institutions and organisations,[12] and between structures and institutions (Bingen, 2000). Bingen argues that focus on structures alone is not sufficient to transform patterns of power and inequality, since institutions also contribute to these patterns (2000: 15). For example, familial and communal institutions set out women's role in society, and policies to change formal structures of power to include women's participation might not be sufficient to transform their actual participation without change in beliefs and norms as well.

In the criticisms of current humanitarian practice, much stress has been placed on the political and economic structures that determine the context within which conflicts arise. While these structures are clearly crucial in determining the preconditions for conflict, remaining focused on this level alone does not tell us how or why potential for conflict is translated into actual conflict. More importantly, focusing on macrostructures alone does not help us to understand how different people and groups are drawn into conflict, on what terms, and how patterns of livelihood strategies are transformed and configured in each different case of conflict. Hence, we require both political economy and livelihood analysis in order to understand the dynamics of individual conflicts, and on this basis, the ways in which conflict can be resolved sustainably (see below).

In the context of chronic conflict and political instability, the importance of institutions at all levels is evident in the development of the war economy. The livelihoods framework for analysis should start with a clearly disaggregated consideration of institutions, examining the transformations occurring in familial, communal, social, collective, and policy institutions during conflict.[13] Such a disaggregated approach should also facilitate the identification of entry points for intervention, as long as there is careful consideration of the way in which these institutions are inter-related or at times 'nested' within each other.[14]

The key here is to understand how institutions and structures relate to the conflict dynamics – to what extent have institutions been established and/or co-opted as part of the conflict. Recent research has begun to raise these questions, with particular emphasis on communal and social institutions. Watson et al. (1999: 11) cite evidence from Somalia and Afghanistan suggesting that in the conflict situation many traditional institutions and forms of authority gather strength as they respond to new issues and problems. Richards (1996) detailed the Revolutionary United Force's use of beliefs and ways of life developed in 'forest society' as part of their politico-military campaign in Sierra Leone. Geffray (1990) documented how local Makua institutions in Mozambique were brought into the civil war and transformed by both the Renamo guerrillas and the Frelimo government, but in turn used their institutional power to influence the course of the conflict. Black, Schafer and Serra (2000) have been exploring the ways in which a variety of institutions for natural resource management in Mozambique have been transformed during the conflict and post-conflict years.

4.3   Sustainability in situations of chronic conflict and political instability

The concept of sustainability in the context of livelihoods approaches is intended to capture the way in which current livelihoods affect the possibility of future livelihoods to be realised. Chambers and Conway distinguished environmental and social sustainability (1992). Defined in the negative, livelihoods 'are environmentally unsustainable if they have a net negative effect on the claims and access needed by others' (1992: 13). Social sustainability refers to 'whether a human unit can not only gain but also maintain an adequate and decent livelihood', both by coping with stress and shocks, and 'enhancing and exercising capabilities in adapting to, exploiting and creating change, and assuring continuity' (1992: 14).

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[12] Following Uphoff (1992) Bingen defines 'institutions' as the rules of the game, and 'organisations' as the players.
[13] See Bingen (2000) for definitions.
[14] See also Ostrom (1990) for a discussion of the nested nature of institutions in relation to common property regimes.

DFID defines sustainability in its livelihoods framework in four dimensions: environmental, economic, social and institutional. Environmental sustainability for them refers to conserving or enhancing the productive resource base; economic sustainability is the sustenance of a basic level of economic welfare; 'social sustainability is achieved when social exclusion is minimised and social equity maximised'; 'institutional sustainability is achieved when prevailing structures and processes have the capacity to continue to perform their functions over the long term' (DFID, 1999: Section 1.4).

There are several elements to note in relation to sustainability. A general point is that the sustainability calculus will vary considerably depending on the level at which it is made. As Chambers and Conway pointed out, the livelihoods of people living in rich Northern countries (and rich people in Southern countries) tend to have a much greater impact on the ability of future generations and even current generations in other parts of the world, than do the livelihoods of poor people in Southern countries (1992: 13). In thinking about the vulnerability of livelihoods of people in the South, we should keep in mind global linkages and long-distance effects.

A second point relates more specifically to thinking about livelihoods in situations of chronic instability. Several observers have noted that the objective of institutional sustainability for agencies working in situations of chronic conflict and political instability may be overly optimistic, given the structural constraints common to these situations (Le Billon, 2000: 25; Harvey, Maxwell and Campbell, 1998: 17). In particular, anchoring programmes in government institutions, which was formerly a plank of development practice, is problematic in situations in which these institutions are involved in conflict, or are incapable of providing services. One approach to this problem has been to abandon the idea of sustainability, thereby allowing non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies to take over service provisioning (Buchanan-Smith, 2000: 7, Macrae et al. 1997: 236–7).

Christoplos criticises the way in which discussion of public institutions in these contexts has painted a 'black and white' picture, tarnishing all public servants with the same brush and thereby overlooking opportunities that exist for a creative way around the dilemma (2000a: 354–5). He argues, following Addo, that we do not know what the structural conditions for a 'sustainable' public service are, and that we need therefore to exercise 'creative pessimism' in looking for ways to foster integrity. He recommends that rather than disengaging because of a belief in the determining nature of structures, we should renew our faith in human agency, and recognise the complex mixture of motives that are present in varying degrees in different individuals. Christoplos concludes that what is needed are perspectives that are both macro and micro, that is, attention to both political structures and the power of individual actors. Cliffe and Luckham suggest that 'reconstitution of the state itself is at once prerequisite, means and target of rehabilitation' (2000: 304).

Sustainable institutions may therefore be a target of interventions in situations of chronic instability, rather than a necessary prerequisite. The livelihoods approach, in starting from the ground up, and building on strengths and capacities to create further capabilities, may present methodological advantages for achieving this goal.

The objective of economic sustainability might also be subject to compromise in situations of chronic instability, given that cost recovery is virtually impossible in most situations of conflict (Harvey, Maxwell and Campbell, 1998: 17). Further, criteria of economic sustainability might conflict with other priorities such as ensuring peace in a transitional period. For example, in Mozambique planners adopted a short-term approach to pacifying newly demobilised combatants, providing them with a bi-monthly payment for the first eighteen months as both an incentive to put down their weapons and a means of dispersing them so that they did not present such an organised

threat to the peace process (Schafer, 1999). Donors recognised that this was not a basis for an economically sustainable livelihood, but saw it as necessary to 'buy the peace'. While the lack of sustainability caused some problems when the payments ended, the symbolic meaning of the payment achieved more than a simple economic purpose. In some ways, what looked like an unsustainable economic strategy ended up bolstering ex-combatants' social assets, because many invested their payments in social capital (holding parties or giving presents to family upon being reunited), which in turn assisted them with gaining productive assets such as land.

A final point, applicable to any livelihoods approach which includes sustainability as an integral factor, is that this objective may not be one which garners consensus amongst all people, in particular poor people who are usually the targets of development policy. Hence, the criterion of sustainability as an essential part of any livelihoods package may conflict with what is billed as the core of livelihoods approaches, namely putting the priorities of poor people first. Two potentially controversial areas can be highlighted.

First, the assumption of universal commitment to ensuring that our livelihoods do not make it more difficult for other people to achieve their livelihoods is not necessarily justified empirically. While few people would be happy to learn that what they were doing now might result in starvation for someone in another part of the world, it is also the case that few people do give up their cherished ways of life even though they know that taken as a whole, their livelihood strategies have a negative impact on the livelihood capacities of other people not immediately present (either geographically or temporally removed).

On the other hand, the objective of sustainability as defined by Chambers precludes the possibility that a livelihood which is sustainable (i.e. over time) for one individual but damages the livelihoods of many others, for example, one relying on the strategy of asset stripping, or using violence, would be considered 'sustainable' in the overall sense of the term. Thus, 'sustainable livelihoods' can be used as a normative concept for censuring livelihoods which are damaging to net livelihood sustainability.

Secondly, the ideal of social equity advanced by the DFID livelihoods model and by Chambers is an even less universally held belief. Bell (1999) criticises the imposition of models of social equity on local cultures in many natural resource management projects. For example, projects often decree that any income realised from the use of natural resources must be distributed equally amongst community members, while local cultural traditions espouse different principles for distribution of goods.

On the other hand, radically unequal distribution of wealth in society has been identified as one factor closely linked with the eruption of social tension into violent conflict (Carbonnier, 1998). Some might see this evidence as justifying the imposition of social equity models from outside, even where these clash with local beliefs.

These issues highlight political questions that need to be considered in applications of livelihoods approaches. Where outside objectives conflict with the principles of some, if not all, of the intended beneficiaries of assistance, how are such conflicts to be resolved? What are the potential implications of this dissonance for establishing partnership and trust? DFID states that environmental sustainability is a principle which shall not be compromised, whatever the circumstances (Carney, 1998: 4), although they also recognise that there are inevitably trade-offs to be confronted between different elements of the livelihoods approach and dimensions of sustainability.

Similarly, Scoones raises the potential problem of conflicts between different livelihoods and between different objectives within livelihoods (1998: 7). He suggests that the sustainable

livelihoods approach does not offer a simple method for resolving these conflicts, but by highlighting them, it makes them easier to perceive, discuss and confront rather than obscuring and ignoring. Given the diversity of local contexts, it would perhaps be better for local debate to resolve such conflicts of belief, rather than attempting to find a universal formula for prioritising – especially given the emphasis on participation in livelihoods approaches.

4.4 Political economy and livelihoods frameworks for analysis

Growing awareness of the problems of humanitarian aid in situations of conflict and chronic conflict and political instability have led to the emergence of a general consensus that a political economy analysis of conflict is required in order to inform approaches to humanitarian assistance (Buchanan-Smith, 2000: 10; Leader, 2000; Duffield, 1998; Le Billon, 2000; Keen, 1994). In its simplest form, the political economy approach to chronic conflict and political instability attempts to uncover 'who gains and who loses' from the war economy and instability (Le Billon, 2000). Thus, it answers the question of 'who is doing what to whom' and 'why' in a war economy.

A livelihoods framework for analysis should be complementary to a political economy approach, as its main focus is the 'how' of livelihoods. In fact, a really complete livelihoods analysis might actually answer many of the same questions as the political economy approach, since the analysis of livelihoods should give detail about the strategies and goals of all the different groups in society and how they are linked with each other. Livelihoods analysis is intended also to make the links between micro and macro explicit, as in political economy.

However, some people have raised the criticism that power relations, and politics more generally, are under-emphasised, if not neglected, by sustainable livelihoods approaches (Ashley and Carney, 1999: 2). For example, 'political capital' is not included in the assets pentagon (see Figure 1, section 3.3), whereas political assets could be considered crucial for influencing policies and processes which in turn influence livelihood strategies and other assets in the pentagon. To correct for this, UNDP has added 'political capital' to their livelihoods analysis (DFID, 2000b: 30).

It is an open question whether the addition of political capital can capture the missing elements of the livelihoods analysis in situations of chronic conflict and political instability. However, it is not necessary to advocate that the livelihoods framework replace entirely political economy analysis. There is no reason why the two approaches to analysis could not complement each other, the one asking 'who, what and why', and the other detailing 'how', as well as adding to the 'who, what and why'. The methodological tools proposed by Le Billon (2000) for political economy analysis would provide information also important for a livelihoods analysis, and potentially vice versa.

The livelihoods approach offers added value to the political economy approach not only for its attention to detail at the level of livelihoods, but also because political economy analysis can be somewhat reductionist in attributing all motivations to economic or political interests. The livelihoods approach does not prejudge this issue, but allows social and cultural issues (in institutions as well as assets) to be given equal consideration.

Once a political economy analysis has provided the outlines of who is gaining and who is losing in a war economy, this information could be used as a basis to design interventions which can better support livelihoods. Without this information, it is difficult to answer the question of whose livelihoods should be supported and how – the risk is that some types of livelihood support will simply feed into exploitative patterns established during the war, or support will be given directly to the perpetrators of violence rather than to its victims. Much analysis of war economies over the past decade has challenged the simplistic idea that local authorities and/or civil society are above the political fray, since it has become clear that they, too, can be complicit or actively involved in

conflict. This should be made explicit by a political economy analysis and incorporated into the livelihoods analysis as well as informing any potential interventions.

The political economy of war analysis also challenges simple links between poverty and vulnerability, arguing that vulnerability is as much an effect of powerlessness as poverty (Le Billon, 2000: 13). This is supported by evidence from war economies that suggests it is often those who have more assets who are most vulnerable to predation (Keen, 1994). This is not to say that poverty does not also link with vulnerability; those who are poor are clearly less able to cope with stresses and shocks to their livelihoods, and may be more prone to falling out of reciprocal exchange networks as well (Frankenberger and Garrett, 1998). But poverty is not the only aspect of vulnerability, particularly in situations of a violent war economy. These insights from the political economy analysis of war should be incorporated into livelihoods frameworks in situations of political instability.

Another important contribution of a political economy of war approach is that it helps to analyse the potential effects of peace settlements or changes in the aid environment generally, on interests and incentives (Le Billon, 2000: 2–1). It thus becomes clear that patterns of incentives will have to change in order for the groups benefiting from and sustaining conflict to be convinced to accept a peaceful alternative. Livelihoods analysis could supplement this recognition of the general pattern of incentives, in order to devise ways and means of assuring livelihoods to former belligerents. There is no room to be naïve about the prospects for peaceful livelihoods in the absence of a change in the incentive pattern – predatory movements often depend precisely on structures of exploitation that deprive others of livelihoods, rather than it being simply an unfortunate side-effect. More is needed beyond the simple promotion of livelihoods, and likely more than any aid instrument on its own can provide without political backing at higher levels (Le Billon, 2000: 21).

4.5   War economies and livelihoods

There is an increasing literature on the economic effects of internal conflicts, particularly at the national level (Stewart et al. 1997; Collier and Gunning, 1995; Stewart et al. 2000). Carbonnier argues that the economic costs of war depend on a variety of factors, such as the duration and magnitude of conflict; international trade embargoes; public service and state collapse; lack of alternative support networks (1998: 15). Le Billon states that wars which involve civil conflict can become 'vicious circles', causing a reduction in investment and a consequent slow-down in economic growth, so triggering a new round of social unrest and scramble for resources (2000: 4). Hence, the course of the conflict itself is influenced in part by the type of war economy (Berdal and Malone, 2000).

Le Billon suggests that the political economy of war varies according to three principal categories (2000: 1):

1. The war economy: Production, mobilisation and allocation of economic resources to sustain the conflict. In this category, important distinctions are between belligerents who obtain resources for war externally, those who obtain them internally by exploiting natural resources, and those who obtain them by predation on civilian populations.[15]

2. The collateral impacts of war: Unintended consequences of war on the economy, such as the reconfiguration of production systems, fall in foreign investments.

3. The economic strategies of war: For example, embargoes, deliberate destruction of economic infrastructure.

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[15] Obviously, these strategies are not mutually exclusive.

There is less research at a local level during conflict itself, for obvious reasons. However, there is some evidence from the macro-level that relates to micro-level issues, as well as a growing body of micro-level research on livelihood patterns in conflict situations, and research at a micro-level after open conflict has ceased.

Stewart et al. (1997) use the notion of entitlements to assess how living standards are affected by conflicts. Their research showed that public entitlements (goods and services provided by the state) are most affected by conflict, but this decline 'can be countered by alternative forms of public and civil entitlements provided by emerging social networks and the burgeoning informal economy, or by rebel groups and/or humanitarian agencies' (Carbonnier, 1998: 14). Thus, as Le Billon states, vulnerability is affected by the structure and performance of the overall economy, but also people's entitlements to goods, services and resources (2000: 11). At household level, FitzGerald (1997: 53) found that the urban poor and landless are often worst affected by war, as they have less access to informal quasi-rents and fall outside welfare nets. Within households, war has profound effects on gender relations (Carbonnier, 1998: 16).

Macrae et al. (1997) note that the primary effect of conflict and insecurity on livelihoods is to narrow drastically the options for obtaining a livelihood. Le Billon states that 'it is when coping strategies are deliberately blocked or manipulated that populations are most vulnerable' (2000: 12). 'Vulnerability' is traditionally defined as the lack of ability to cope with stress or shocks, and thus is a central issue to tackle in situations of chronic conflict and political instability, which provide many stresses and shocks.

Thus, one important objective of a livelihoods approach in such situations would be not simply to support people in their current livelihoods, which may be insufficient, unsustainable or undesirable (as judged by people themselves), but to concentrate on providing as much choice and options for livelihoods as possible. This is particularly important given evidence that a common strategy for dealing with all kinds of risk is to diversify livelihood activities (Scoones, 1998). An approach that focuses on increasing livelihood options fits well with Chambers' original vision of the livelihoods paradigm, which centres on 'decentralised process and choice' (1989: 20). Rather than providing a uniform package, such as seeds and tools, or food, the idea is to provide 'baskets of choices' for more diverse, complex and risk-prone livelihoods.[16]

Chambers and Conway detail the pattern they detected in household livelihood responses to crises and shocks, from stinting to hoarding, protecting, depleting, diversifying, claiming and moving (1992: 15–6). Scoones groups strategies into three principal categories (referring specifically to rural livelihoods): agricultural intensification/extensification; livelihood diversification, and migration (1998: 9). Much evidence supports claims that people aim to protect the basis of their livelihoods even at great cost to current standard of living (Boudreau, 1998: 20). People will go hungry before they will eat the seeds for the next year's crops, for example (de Waal, 1989).

Coping strategies identified by Le Billon specifically in situations of war are: falling back on subsistence farming; participating in the informal economy; obtaining humanitarian relief; resorting to violence (2000: 13). Sogge's analysis of livelihood strategies in Angola added also mutual labour practices, the revival of old crafts such as blacksmithing, tinkering and ceramics, and a more abstract one of 'overcoming social taboos and personal pride', perhaps related to 'prostitution, drug dealing, petty theft and armed robbery' (1994: 102–3). There is clear overlap between these analyses and the above analyses of livelihood strategies in 'normal' times. However, violent livelihood strategies are not dealt with frontally in the literature on sustainable livelihoods, although it is implicitly understood that such strategies are unlikely to be considered sustainable given the effects they have on the livelihoods of other people.

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[16] Chambers was referring to farming systems of rain fed agriculture, which are risk-prone.

Macrae et al. (1997) also warn against supporting livelihood patterns that have arisen as a result of conflict but are exploitative. This reinforces the call for a political economy analysis of conflict in order to understand the relations of power underlying different livelihoods, and the connections between the livelihoods of the poor and those of the wealthy.

On the other hand, Le Billon states that not all economic activities in war-time are negative, greed-driven activities conducted by armed groups and fuelling conflict; they can also provide a key means of survival for populations (2000: 9). The following section on social capital expands on this theme.

These points lead us to emphasise the centrality of people's own definitions and priorities in livelihoods approaches, without assuming that what people are doing at the time is what they would most like to be doing in the future; people need to be given the opportunity to participate fully in defining their priorities at all stages of analysis and intervention. In the context of conflict situations, and in particular in post-conflict transition periods, it is likely that there will be a high degree of movement and change in people's livelihood strategies, assets, and desired outcomes.

Extending analysis to the post-war period, Bruck (2000) and Bruck, FitzGerald and Grigsby (2000) find significant effects of war on household livelihoods many years after the end of the war, and draw the policy implication that reconstruction needs continue for much longer than is usually believed. Bruck suggests that the negative impacts of war on public finances means that rural reconstruction will likely be dependent on foreign aid for many years after the war. He concludes that 'rural reconstruction and household welfare are jointly dependent on the legacy of the war, the nature of the post-war settlement and the efficiency of foreign aid' (2000: 14). Thus, the war economy will clearly continue to be relevant in its effects on livelihoods even after there has been an end to full-scale violent conflict.

4.6   Social capital in situations of chronic conflict and political instability

Many authors hold that conflict destroys social capital, particularly elements such as bonds of trust within communities, relations of reciprocity, shared social norms and rules, and social networks.[17] There is evidence of this process in a wide variety of contexts. Cliffe and Luckham refer to the 'subtle and corrosive impact of conflicts on […] the rules and practices of politics and upon institutions, or what others term social capital' (2000: 302). Azarya claims that the 'moral economy of exchange' breaks down during long periods of stress and scarcity (cited in Harvey, 1997: 17), as do Frankenberger and Garrett (1998: 6). Carbonnier writes that,

> The social and cultural disintegration of war-torn societies has a dramatic impact on the economy. In the absence of minimal political stability, mutual trust, and respect for property and the rule of law, economic relations break down. This in turn may have multiplier effects on the fall of domestic production and income (1998: 14).

However, this picture might be oversimplified, and neglect processes which move in the opposite direction. Chingono, for example, identified the war conditions in Mozambique as giving opportunities for new 'barefoot entrepreneurs' to enter petty trade, develop social networks and a flourishing source of income (1994). Schafer (1999) found new relationships formed by young men in the army in Mozambique became an important source of social capital for post-war livelihood activity, although this varied depending on the location, the fighting force in question, and the particular experience of conflict. Wilson, also writing about Mozambique, documented the rise of

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[17] For a broader discussion of social capital and sustainable livelihoods, see Pretty (n/d); Frankenberger and Garrett (1998). For early formulations of the concept of social capital, see Coleman (1988; 1990), and Putnam (1993).

the Naparama peasant force in the late years of the conflict: a new group drawing on cultural beliefs, which challenged both government and rebel armies in order to establish a zone of peace within which people could re-establish some form of productive livelihoods (1992).

Harvey argues that primary groupings that are more traditional, ascriptive and informal (kinship networks, traditional political institutions and ethnic groups) are often reinforced by conflict, or at least are better able to survive conflict than secondary level organisations such as voluntary and formal ones (1997: 13). He argues that 'processes affecting civil society are more complex and contradictory' than the simple view of conflict as destructive of civil society would have us believe, and that 'civil society is often simultaneously an important source of support at the same time that it is being undermined and contested' (1997: 16).

Thus, it is clear that what is needed in a livelihoods analysis in situations of chronic conflict and political instability is a dynamic picture capturing the ways in which social capital is being transformed for distinct groups in different ways, as well as which elements of social capital are being strengthened or weakened – rather than judging *a priori* that social capital is bound to be altogether destroyed by conflict. Programmes of reconstruction might build upon the 'potentially transformational legacies of complex political emergencies' (Cliffe and Luckham, 2000: 304).

Furthermore, the concept of social capital provides a possible entry point for support to livelihoods in situations of chronic conflict and political instability, since in some forms it is an asset which is less easily targeted by rebel forces, an 'invisible asset', as it were. Some agencies have already adapted their practice in situations of chronic instability to become more flexible, small-scale, minimising the use of external resources and focusing on moveable and transferable skills such as training, as well as the promotion of civil associations included in the idea of social capital (Harvey, Maxwell and Campbell, 1998: 17).

The capability approach, as Sen pioneered it, sees social capital[18] as both intrinsically valuable (i.e. people value friendships and social relations in themselves), and instrumentally valuable for the way in which it assists in the formation of other types of capital. However, Pretty stresses that not all forms of social capital may be good for everyone, and 'some associations can act as obstacles to the emergence of sustainable livelihoods' (n/d: 17). Similarly, Harvey warns against a simplistic promotion of 'civil society' in situations of chronic conflict and political instability, since 'civil society is not independent from predatory local authorities – just as states penetrate civil society, so do warlords' (1997: 20). 'Civil society' can also be remarkably 'uncivil', for example the Interahamwe, which was part of civil society and central to the 'success' of genocide in Rwanda. Harvey also warns that external support for civil society – usually in the form of the promotion of local associations, such as NGOs – often transforms the original objectives of the association, or stimulates the creation of organisations whose goals are more closely linked to those of the external body than of the supposed constituency. Social capital is not synonymous with 'civil society', or any particular form of organisation, but it has been translated into the support for local organisations because of the structure of aid agencies and the pervading imperative to 'work with local partners'.

Hence, once again the evidence suggests that a clear analysis of the concrete processes going on in each situation of chronic conflict and political instability is necessary in order to undertake any activity which purports to support livelihoods. Such an analysis needs to understand not simply which forms of social capital are in existence and how they fit within people's livelihood strategies, but also the wider political economy context that is affecting and interacting with local livelihoods and social capital. Nor can support for social capital be seen as a panacea, or a stand-alone solution; attention needs to be paid to the macro level and to politics as well (Harvey, 1997: 45).

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[18] This is not Sen's term, but his list of capabilities and values includes elements that the DFID framework and others have ascribed to this type of asset.

4.7   Poverty and vulnerability

Poverty elimination – based on people's own conceptions of poverty and priorities for its elimination – is considered to be one of the main objectives of the promotion of livelihoods approaches. Although there is an extensive literature on poverty written from a developmental perspective, the links between conflict and poverty have only begun to be examined relatively recently. In his overview of the literature available, Jonathan Goodhand (2001) presents three hypotheses that emerge from this literature: conflict causes poverty; poverty causes conflict; and resource wealth causes conflict. Each of these are briefly examined in the following paragraphs, drawing largely on Goodhand's review.

There is a considerable amount of research to illustrate that the impacts of war vary according to the nature, duration and phase of the conflict and the background social and economic context that exists. At the macro level, conflict leads to a fall in GDP per capita, reduced food production and exports, a fall in gross investment, and reductions in government revenues and expenditure (Stewart and FitzGerald, 2000). In protracted conflicts, war profoundly shapes not only the economy but also political and social processes. At the micro level, entitlement analysis illustrates the ways in which war leads to a decline in direct entitlements, market and civic entitlements, and public entitlements, (Goodhand, 2001). Conflict also causes inter-generational exclusion, marginalisation and the loss of rights for certain sections of the population (Richards, 1996; Keen, 1998; de Waal, 1997).

It is generally agreed that conflict causes poverty, but the hypothesis that poverty causes conflict is more contentious (Goodhand, 2001). Recent literature suggests that it is not poverty itself that causes conflict, but that inequality, exclusion and poverty contribute to grievances that are used by leaders to mobilise followers and legitimate violent actions (Stewart and FitzGerald, 2000). Grievance may stem from historical development strategies (e.g. Rwanda, Nepal), from bad governance (e.g. Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka), and from international policies such as structural adjustment programmes and trade deregulation (Goodhand, 2001). Where these processes have contributed to the creation of extreme horizontal inequalities (and particularly where this coincides with ethnic or religious boundaries between minorities and majorities), an external shock may trigger conflict in which existing underlying grievances are expressed in the form of violence.

In opposition to the 'grievance' argument is the view that war is motivated by greed; that it is resource wealth, rather than poverty that is more likely to cause violent conflict (see Collier, 2000). The 'greed' argument emphasises the economic aspects of conflict and has a tendency to overlook political motivations. Indeed, this is one of the dangers of adopting a narrow economic definition of poverty in the context of conflict. While a livelihoods approach is useful in overcoming simplistic economic definitions of poverty, this paper argues that much greater attention needs to be paid to political factors in applying a livelihoods approach to chronic conflict situations. This is particularly so in understanding the concept of vulnerability.

While poverty and poverty alleviation have received considerable attention in development literature and practice, the notion of vulnerability and the reduction of vulnerability form a major focus within the humanitarian sector. From a livelihoods perspective, 'vulnerability' tends to be defined as the lack of ability to cope with stress or shocks. Within the livelihoods framework presented in Figure 1, the 'vulnerability context' is seen to be external to livelihood strategies and outcomes. But in situations of chronic conflict political instability, the vulnerability of a community, household or individual is closely related to powerlessness (i.e. political and economic processes of neglect, exclusion or exploitation) (Le Billon, 2000), and to the particular livelihood or coping strategies that they pursue (Pain and Lautze, 2002). In applying a livelihoods approach to situations of chronic conflict and political instability, the centrality of vulnerability must be emphasised. The nature of vulnerability in chronic conflict situations requires an 'understanding of

the interaction of local livelihoods and people's coping or survival strategies with the transforming political economies of which they are part' (Collinson et al, 2002). Vulnerability is particularly increased when the livelihoods of particular populations are deliberately blocked or undermined by insurgents (Le Billon, 2000).

While there are clear links between poverty and vulnerability – those who are poor tend to be less able to cope with stresses and shocks – it is not only the poor who are vulnerable. In the case of southern Sudan, Keen (1994) showed that the Dinka were particularly exposed to the risk of violence because of their wealth of resource assets. Poverty is not the only determinant of vulnerability: those who lack power are unable to safeguard their basic political, economic and social rights and may find it difficult to protect themselves from violence. It has therefore been suggested that classic conceptions of vulnerability need to be questioned in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (Goodhand, 2001).

4.8 Livelihoods approaches and humanitarian relief

One of the criticisms levelled at the humanitarian community in recent years has been that 'developmental relief' is a smokescreen for diminishing budgets and donor fatigue in situations of chronic conflict and political instability (Macrae, 1999b). This argument has prompted calls for a return to the primary goals of humanitarian relief, namely the provision of basic goods for the relief of suffering. White and Cliffe argue, however, that this is avoiding the problem rather than tackling it at source: if donors are diminishing their aid budgets to the extent that needs are not being met, this should be denounced directly (2000: 324). It does not mean, they argue, that attempts should not be made to make relief more responsive to developmental needs at the same time as it responds to basic needs.

An important question is whether livelihoods approaches can be harmonised with the principles of traditional humanitarian relief. For example, CARE distinguishes between livelihood protection in emergency situations, short-term livelihood provisioning and long-term livelihood promotion as a tool for development (Ashley and Carney, 1999: 25). This approach should achieve the same goals as relief, but by focusing on the role of relief within livelihoods rather than simply on the quantity of goods delivered, there is the potential for being more effective at all stages. For example, support for livelihoods by de-mining land for agriculture does not preclude provision of food aid until the first harvest, or of safety nets for those who are unable to labour. Keen and Wilson (1994: 216) suggest that simple things such as bringing down grain prices can tackle some of the causes of violence – for this, a livelihoods analysis and a political economy analysis are both needed to identify how such an intervention can best be managed.

Ideally, such an approach makes it less likely that relief will undermine later developmental goals, a concern which has been expressed by many in the development community. While some dismiss this concern as ill-founded, practitioners interviewed in the course of this overview cited dependency as a real problem in their work in places that have been the target of relief aid.

CARE also stresses the importance of basic conditions for intervention, and the idea of 'ground rules' as discussed above (CARE, 1999). This may help to answer criticisms that any approach to development rather than pure relief in situations of humanitarian need risks ignoring needs. A livelihoods approach could perhaps be supplemented by basic principles of humanitarianism. This is a key research issue that needs to be investigated – how can a livelihoods approach be implemented in such a way that humanitarian principles are still respected?

This approach does not answer the critics who suggest that by surrendering the pretence of complete neutrality and impartiality, humanitarian agencies jeopardise the tenuous 'deal' with

belligerents to ensure access for relief aid to civilian populations. But the way in which international humanitarian law is intentionally flouted in many of today's conflicts suggests that the basis for humanitarian law is much more shaky now in any case (Leader, 2000). Some conclude that 'the reality of conflict situations suggests that relief aid cannot be politically neutral (Duffield, Macrae and Zwi, 1994: 228).

In this context, both international political action to back up humanitarian law and local action to protect livelihoods may be needed. A political economy analysis is a basic requirement to determine how best to achieve these goals. Such a comprehensive and coherent course of action is a tall order in today's political climate, and it raises other questions such as the denial of sovereignty – but it may be required for any kind of humanitarian aid to achieve its objectives in the context of 'new wars'. These problems confront all relief aid, not only that which promotes livelihoods rather than simply donating food.

4.9 Livelihoods and international influences

The DFID livelihoods framework, and many of the other applications of livelihoods approaches, contain very few direct references to the international context and global factors that affect local livelihoods. There are references to the way in which the sustainable livelihoods framework is 'multi-level', and insistence on the importance of micro-macro linkages – but these all seem to stop at the national level, with national policies of governance. Examination of the dynamics of current situations of chronic conflict and political instability, however, point to a high degree of involvement of international actors in national affairs.

International factors relevant to the context within which local livelihoods are played out range from broad patterns such as global flows of capital, international financial policy, terms of trade and commodity prices, to specific connections such as resource trading networks, migrant diasporas, arms and drug trafficking, and international political relations (Duffield, 1998). Humanitarian and development aid have received the most attention as international influences on national conflicts, but in terms of volume and value, other flows of goods often make a greater impact on the political economy of conflicts (Buchanan-Smith, 2000: 11), and other pressures on the nation state such as structural adjustment are more influential than a particular aid project or programme within that structure (Macrae and Zwi, 1994). Punitive measures such as sanctions, and even, on occasion, armed intervention (Kosovo, Somalia, Iraq), can also provide more intense pressure than changes in the flow of aid.

There is no inherent reason why livelihoods analysis should stop at the national level, rather than incorporating the influence of international policies, institutions and processes into the livelihoods framework. Similarly, there is no reason why livelihoods approaches could not identify interventions that are relevant to livelihoods but would take place at an international level. The international factors involved clearly need to be considered explicitly, particularly, but not only, in situations of chronic conflict and political instability.

4.10 Rights and livelihoods

'Basic rights are undermined by economic upheaval, the collapse of public goods, asset stripping and human rights abuses' (Le Billon, 2000: 4). Much of the literature criticising the transformation of humanitarian aid into a tool for development focuses on the neglect of basic rights, which has often accompanied this process in the past (Macrae and Zwi, 1994). In some respects, this can be seen as a criticism of the switch to favouring social and economic rights implicit in a 'developmental approach' over legal and civil rights, which are at the centre of humanitarian law.

However, commentators have levelled criticisms against the traditional humanitarian approach which emphases neutrality and impartiality to the extent that it may overlook the actual negative effects on human rights which can be a consequence of this approach in current conflicts (de Waal, 1996). Some agencies have responded to these criticisms by devising 'ground rules' or basic principles which are intended to apply both to their own practice and to promote adherence by warring parties to humanitarian law (see Leader, 2000; Atkinson and Leader, 2000; Bradbury et al. 2000). Others have developed 'guidelines', with perhaps less moral force but intended to be used as tools to guide practice.

Rights-based development approaches in situations of chronic conflict and political instability may also run into problems when donors and agencies emphasise partnership, but find in practice that partners do not necessarily agree with their particular agenda of liberal human rights. This problem is linked with the issue of institutions and legitimacy discussed above.

DFID sees rights-based and livelihoods approaches to development as 'complementary perspectives that seek to achieve many of the same goals (for example, empowerment of the most vulnerable and a strengthened capacity of the poor to achieve secure livelihoods)' (1999, Section 1). Chambers saw the livelihoods approach, or 'putting people first', as a fundamental recognition of the 'basic human right of poor people to conduct their own analysis' (1995: 36). He emphasised the importance of secure tenure rights to improve equity in livelihoods, and a range of other rights as well (Chambers and Conway, 1992). Le Billon recommends adding economic protection or security onto the objective of protection from physical violence as an extension of the core objectives of humanitarian assistance (2000: 21).

However, in practice, and in particular in situations of chronic conflict and political instability, it is unlikely to be such a smooth and simple process to harmonise the different types of rights in a context in which livelihoods and lives are seriously threatened by a breakdown of the relationship of rights and responsibilities between the state and its citizens. An important issue for research, therefore, is the extent to which the promotion of a livelihoods approach in situations of chronic instability is in keeping with, or conversely clashes with, the variety of human rights enshrined in the panoply of United Nations Charters.

The analysis presented here is a preliminary consideration of the relevance of rights based approaches and related issues to this research. However, we acknowledge the currently active debate in humanitarian circles around rights-based humanitarianism and needs-based humanitarianism.[19] A review of this developing literature will be incorporated into the three-year project proposed.

4.11 Operational issues for livelihoods approaches in situations of chronic conflict and political instability

One obvious problem for livelihoods approaches in situations of chronic instability is that they require a significant amount of information gathering. It became clear from consultation with agencies working in these situations that they often have little time, short and inflexible funding windows, insufficient resources, and lack of quality staff for such an undertaking.

However, those who have attempted the slow and careful approach have reported some success with it; in the process they have had to confront local expectations which were developed on the basis of previous 'emergency' modalities of aid delivery (Harvey, Maxwell and Campbell, 1998: 17). Many of the agencies consulted for this overview are attempting to maintain a long-term

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[19] See, for example, Darcy (forthcoming a).

presence in the areas in which they work, in order to build up a good basis for understanding the situation. A long-term presence in unstable situations may also assist in identifying preventive measures rather than simply being reduced to reacting to crisis. Thus, the attempt is being made to intervene before the point at which livelihoods are unable to recover, making it much easier to design interventions to support livelihoods rather than needing to supply goods in a potentially disempowering manner.

DFID's response to the quantity/quality dilemma is to recommend a broad, shallow approach to livelihoods analysis initially, and identify on the basis of the broad picture issues that need to be explored in more detail.

Another operational constraint to gathering accurate information is that in situations of political instability – as in other situations – people have a variety of incentives for bending the truth to suit their own interests. Security concerns influence people's ability to provide information, while others attempt to produce rumours as part of military strategy. Conducting accurate analysis when the conflict dynamics are complex and multi-layered is not a simple task. Furthermore, there are serious practical challenges for agencies gathering information in dangerous and insecure environments. These problems affect the political economy approach as well, which is even more directly inquiring into potentially sensitive political issues. Thus, discourses and narratives have to be identified and unpicked as well; there is no simple solution for gathering 'objective' information.

An equally fundamental problem for livelihoods approaches generally, not simply in situations of chronic conflict and political instability, is that current funding structures for assistance do not allow beneficiaries to define entry points themselves. In practice, donors and government select entry points before beneficiaries can even be consulted. Therefore, 'agencies are not free to empower communities to generate their own project ideas and are expected to respond to government requests' (DFID, 2000b: 25). This could be particularly problematic in situations of chronic instability, in which not only time constraints but also insecurity could prevent proper consultation with beneficiaries.

Not only should funding be flexible, but the design of programmes needs also to be flexible and responsive to local needs and specific conditions. As argued above (section 3), livelihoods analyses reveal the diversity of ways of gaining a livelihood, as well as the range of valued livelihood outcomes pursued by different people. Thus, it is not only for reasons of empowerment that mean local consultation is necessary, but also for practical reasons in order to make programmes appropriate to each situation.

Analysts of aid should continue to raise questions about the ways in which funding structures affect programming in potentially negative and disempowering ways. The persistence of practices despite changing rhetoric suggests that underlying structures, as well as organisational cultures and informal institutions all need to be examined and transformed in order really to effect lasting change. The adoption of improved conceptual approaches is just one step towards the broader goal of reforming aid practice.

5 Summary of Issues for Further Research

The discussion in section 4 presented a number of issues and highlighted key areas requiring further empirical research, particularly relating to the question of developing and implementing a livelihoods approach in such a way that humanitarian principles are respected. The humanitarian principles of neutrality provide operational tools to agencies responding to situations of chronic conflict and political instability (SCCPI), but are there contradictions between providing support to livelihoods and observing humanitarian principles? The question as to whether 'principled livelihoods support' (i.e. livelihoods support that recognises humanitarian principles) is feasible in SCCPI has yet to be thoroughly explored. Such research requires the adaptation of the livelihoods framework so that it can be applied to SCCPI and appropriate forms of livelihood support identified for specific contexts. In adapting the livelihoods framework, this paper has illustrated the need to incorporate a political economy approach.

A political economy approach can potentially offer the broader, political perspective that livelihoods approaches have been criticised as lacking. There are various other complementarities between the two approaches. For example, political economy examines the question of who gains and who loses in a conflict situation; a livelihoods approach can help to explain how these people benefit or remain vulnerable. Political economy seeks to understand political and economic processes with particular emphasis on structures of power and inequality; a livelihoods approach allows for a greater focus on social and cultural processes. By emphasising the nature of powerlessness, political economy challenges the view that vulnerability is determined solely by poverty; livelihoods approaches allow for a more detailed understanding of poverty by looking at resources or capital assets. A livelihoods approach aims to determine people's goals and allows them to express their livelihood preferences for achieving these goals; political economy examines incentives for peace and the potential effects of peace settlements, allowing for a greater understanding of whose livelihoods to support and how. Although both political economy and livelihoods approaches are very broad, it is also important to consider alternative conceptual approaches.

At a more practical level, it must be recognised that there are limits to what humanitarianism can achieve. Humanitarian inputs generally offer a comparatively small contribution to local coping strategies that allow for people to survive in SCCPI. How can agencies better understand these strategies and provide forms of support that effectively respond to the expressed needs of those who are struggling to survive in SCCPI? Given that humanitarian timeframes tend to be very short, an important factor to be considered is how agencies might gather the information and undertake the analysis required to identify appropriate forms of livelihoods support. Even if appropriate support can be identified, the institutions and structures of the humanitarian system currently lack the flexibility necessary for livelihoods support to be funded and implemented. An advocacy agenda will therefore be required to bring about the necessary changes in the structures that exist at the donor level.

In summary, the core issues for further research required to develop the conceptual and practical tools that might allow for 'principled livelihoods support' in SCCPI include the following:

1. How can the livelihoods principles and framework for analysis best be applied in situations of chronic conflict and political instability in order to understand what people are doing and what are their priorities in such environments?

2. How can the livelihoods framework best be adapted for situations of chronic conflict and political instability, to incorporate power relations, political assets, the relevance of the war economy, dynamic change and strategies of adaptation?

3. To what extent can a programme to support livelihoods in situations of chronic conflict and political instability be designed and implemented in a principled way, i.e. taking on board humanitarian principles?

4. Based on the answers of 1 to 3 above, how can we better design assessment methodologies to guide the choice and appropriate design of projects and programmes to support livelihoods?

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Appendix 1 Agency Approaches in Situations of Chronic Conflict and Political Instability

- CARE: Livelihood Security Approach, points to components that affect livelihood. Starting with vulnerable households, it describes how household members access resources, who controls them, and how assets are used to reduce the impact of shock. It provides a roadmap for developing interventions.

- Save the Children: Household Economy Approach, seeks to find out how a change in the economic context of a household or group of households affects their ability to meet their food and non-food needs. It can generate detailed budgets and other information for background, livelihood analysis and as a contribution to project design.

- ActionAid: Concept of vulnerability. Both their development and emergency work seeks to address vulnerability. Starting to do participatory vulnerability analysis, which is qualitative, and seeks to get people to understand why they are vulnerable and act for themselves.

- Rural Livelihoods Department, DFID: Rural Livelihoods Framework, looks at livelihood in terms of 5 types of assets, seeks to make users look at livelihoods holistically. Overall asset base is linked to household's robustness. Robustness in turn can reduce vulnerability to shocks.

- Horn of Africa Department, DFID: No formalised model but basic assumption that the only measure of any significance is household income.

- UNDP: Talk about reducing vulnerability and risk, conflict prevention, recovery and peace building. Closing the gap between relief and development through re-integration and recovery. Starting to apply sustainable livelihoods approach to conflict situations.

- URD (Le Groupe Urgence-Réhabilitation-Développement): Crisis Response Management Cycle.

Appendix 2 Interview List

1. British Non-governmental organisations
   Oxfam

   - James Darcy, Coordinator for Humanitarian Programmes, Asia, Interview, 10/1/01

   - Simon Levine, programme manager in Burundi, Email, 11/1/01

   CARE

   - Karen Westly, Livelihoods advisor

   - Howard Standen, Emergency unit

   - David Sanderson, Urban Interview, 14/12/00

   - Dan Maxwell, CARE Nairobi, Email, 13/12/00

   Save the Children Fund (SCF)

   - Lewis Sida, Emergency Unit, Interview, 14/12/00

   ActionAid

   - Roger Yates – head of emergency unit, Interview, 15/12/00

   Christian Aid

   - Richard Burge, Team Leader for Great Lakes, Interview, 21/12/00

   Responding to Conflict

   - Bridget Walker, Deputy Director, Email, 18/12/00

2. Other Non-governmental organisations
   Redd Barna (Norway)

   - Soren Pedersen, Documents received, 5/1/01

   Urgence-Réhabilitation-Développement (URD)

   - François Grunewald, Coordinator of umbrella group, Email, 14/12/00

3. Multi-lateral and United Nations Agencies

World Food Programme (WFP)

- Paul Clarke, Policy Analyst, Interview, 9/1/01

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

- Naresh Singh, Principle Advisor on Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods, Email, 5/1/01

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), Somalia

- Andre le Sage, Email, 24/1/01

World Bank

- Patricia Cleves, Email, 15/1/01

4. Researchers

- Ian Christoplos, Uppsala University, Sweden

- Richard Black, University of Sussex

- Susanne Jaspars, Oxfam

5. Government agencies

Department for International Development (DFID)

Rural Livelihoods Department

- Jim Harvey, Head of Policy Section, Interview, 14/12/00
- Kenny Dick, Natural Resources Advisor for Horn, Interview, 14/12/00

Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD)

- Simon Mansfield, Humanitarian Advisor, Africa and Greater Horn, Interview, 15/1/01

Infrastructure and Urban Development Department (IUDD)

- John Hodges, Department Head, Telephone conversation, 8/1/01

Health and Population Department (HPD)

- Dr Julian Lob-levyt, Department Head, Interview, 10/1/01

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

- Laura Powers, Email, 12/1/01

Appendix 3 Workshop Report

Supporting Livelihoods in Situations of Chronic Political Instability (SCPI)
Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

Report of the Planning Workshop held on
12th February 2001, at Avonmouth House, London SE1

1. Welcome and introduction of participants

Simon Maxwell (Director, ODI) welcomed the participants, who then introduced themselves. A list of participants is attached.

2. The proposed research programme

Margie Buchanan-Smith (Research Fellow and Group Coordinator of the Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI) provided a background to the research and explained the work that has been done to date. The rationale for the proposed research relates to the increasingly large number of protracted emergencies and collapsed/weak states in which agencies are seeking to provide assistance in addition to that required for immediate life saving. Yet the types of additional assistance are limited by current aid architecture which compartmentalises (often inappropriately) responses into either 'development' or 'relief'. With the conceptual model of a relief-to-development continuum now largely discredited, the proposed research seeks to identify a more suitable conceptual approach to guide aid responses in situations of chronic political instability.

The research will bring together three key areas of ODI's previous and on-going work on:
  i.   The development and application of the sustainable livelihoods framework;
  ii. An understanding of the political economy of conflict; and
  iii. Critical review of attempts to provide assistance in situations of conflict.

A review of some of the conceptual work on supporting livelihoods in SCPI has been carried out. ODI has also brought together this research with an on-going project that is developing an analytical framework and tools for operational agencies to better understand the political economy of conflict. The team has begun to explore both implicit and explicit approaches of different operational agencies and donors and has identified some key research issues and questions. The intention is to develop a three-year research programme in collaboration with operational agencies

The present workshop has been held to bring together those agencies and researchers who have an interest in these issues. It is important that we collaborate and ensure we do not duplicate existing work in this area. The objectives of the workshop are to identify further research issues/questions; to begin to identify case studies; and to identify potential collaborators.

3. Presentation of background review

Jessica Schafer (Research Associate, ODI) summarised her background paper 'Supporting livelihoods in situations of chronic political instability: Overview of issues for a research programme on integrating livelihoods and political economy approaches'. This provides an overview of issues to be addressed by the proposed research programme. The paper defines situations of chronic political instability (SCPI) and explains their main characteristics. While some characteristics are shared with other situations of instability, for example environmental disaster, the distinguishing feature of chronic *political* instability is such that SCPI should be considered

separately in analysing and formulating responses. The evolution of aid practises in SCPI, and ODI's review of current agency practises in working in SCPI is described. The paper then goes on to examine livelihood approaches and to consider the usefulness of a livelihoods framework as a tool for analysis (with particular reference to DFID's Sustainable Livelihoods Framework).

A number of issues are considered of relevance when looking at the potential for using livelihoods approaches to analyse and intervene in SCPI. These are:

- Aid channels and livelihood approaches
- Institutions and structures
- Sustainability in situations of chronic political instability
- Political economy and livelihoods framework for analysis
- War economies and livelihoods
- Social capital in situations of chronic political instability
- Livelihoods approaches and humanitarian relief
- Livelihoods and international influences
- Rights and livelihoods
- Operational issues for livelihood approaches in SCPI.

The paper finishes by summarising the core issues for the proposed research programme and the key stages for the research.

4. Open discussion on issues raised by the background review

A wide-ranging discussion took place in which workshop participants presented their own views. These views have been summarised under a number of common themes:

4.1. Supporting livelihoods based on humanitarian principles
It was noted that people who have taken a political economy approach have been critical of capacity-building approaches; there is a need to keep in mind the humanitarian principles. When talking of humanitarian activity there is the issue of principles, and the use of the word 'humanitarian' serves a political function. The humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality are operational tools. Yet when taking a livelihoods approach there is a need to have access to people. Are there contradictions between supporting livelihoods and humanitarian principles? It was also pointed out that 'humanitarianism' means different things to different people and that this research should be clear of its definition.

4.2. Practicalities: can humanitarian action reinforce livelihoods?
There are great limits to what the humanitarian world can achieve: humanitarian action is relatively insignificant in people's own coping strategies. Livelihoods thinking could promote a more bottom-up approach to humanitarian action, which would be a positive step. Currently some agencies have a more or less standard approach to their interventions and this does not reinforce local livelihoods. Many of the issues faced by those planning a humanitarian response are the same or similar to those planning a response to support livelihoods. Yet the humanitarian timeframe is often very short, and on entering a situation for the first time the information required for a livelihoods approach is simply not available. The information base on which humanitarian programmes are planned is very weak for good reason. A question was raised as to what extent there might be resistance from humanitarian agencies to taking a livelihoods approach due to the extra demands for information and analysis. A key challenge is whether a livelihoods approach to humanitarian action can promote appropriate and principled interventions that effectively respond to the expressed preferences of the poor.

4.3 Livelihoods and peace building

Livelihoods approaches currently lack a broader political peace-building action. It was questioned to what extent trying to bring in peace building is important, as it could be a contradiction with humanitarianism. Some agencies have an implicit acceptance of war and it is therefore not appropriate for them to take part in peace building. On the other hand, if peace building is an objective, then it may be inappropriate to think about supporting livelihoods since the focus should be the reasons for the instability. There are also arguments to support the view that for peace to be sustainable then appropriate livelihoods support is essential, particularly among former belligerents. It was suggested that more local perspectives on conflicts were needed. It was questioned to what extent impartiality was realistically possible.

4.4. Issues of sustainability

A number of participants questioned the appropriateness of always insisting on sustainability and suggested that a critical look at this stance (by agencies such as DFID) was required. For example what is the role of sustainability with programmes in the Great Lakes supporting IDP's and refugees? It was also suggested that while sustainability is an important issue, other notions such as dependency and self-reliance deserve equal consideration.

4.5. Characteristics of the international humanitarian system

There is a wide range of varying mandates – particularly within the UN system – which makes coherent responses difficult. For example, in Somalia there is often only one agency in a particular area doing either relief or development; in some places there is only relief because only relief funding is available or relief is all the agency is mandated to do – there is little flexibility of operation. In many situations food aid remains the dominant response and agencies often then move on to seeds and tools when the food aid is phased out. But food and seed inputs are frequently not the most appropriate responses. One of the hoped-for outcomes of this project should be to inform an advocacy agenda aimed at the donors: the thinking and structures that exist among donors need to change before practice can change.

4.6. State structures and capacity building

It was suggested that a livelihoods approach potentially offers a way of avoiding working with state structures. One of the potential problems of using a livelihoods approach when there is a very weak state is the question of coordination – there is an increased risk of nobody having an overview of activities. It was subsequently clarified that a livelihoods approach was not being suggested with the objective of by-passing the state. In relation to civil society it was recognised that great care is needed in identifying what types of groups to work with: this is particularly important in trying to maintain the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality.

4.7. Key characteristics of livelihoods in SCPI

It was pointed out that globalisation was of crucial importance. For example, in Somalia remittances cannot be ignored as they make aid programmes look like peanuts and radically change the GNP. It should be recognised that the nature of the workforce has changed and that people can now work outside the country. This is especially so in SCPI, where refugees and others create a sizeable diaspora.

4.8. Advantages of integrating livelihoods and political economy approaches

One reason for linking political economy and livelihoods approaches is that – in some situations – certain livelihood strategies are sustainable as a result of the very same dynamics that also make war sustainable. Poor people can be both victims and perpetrators of war. For example, in Cambodia people are attracted to the volatile frontier areas because of economic opportunities; this can jeopardise their longer-term prospects of getting out of the war economy.

A political economy approach allows for a more detailed understanding of livelihoods particularly in relation to both rural-urban links (livelihoods approaches often exclude urban areas) and micro-macro links. Several participants stated the difficulties faced by their agencies in working in urban areas. It is also often difficult to extrapolate the way in which macro-level processes interact with and influence livelihoods at a more micro level.

4.9. Agency experiences

For practical reasons, agencies often have to operate with a very poor information base. UNDP is trying to integrate a livelihoods approach into its area approach, eg. Tajikistan and Cambodia. They recognise that the timeframe is very important: it requires five to ten years for the programme to evolve and respond. In Somalia, a more detailed analysis of the war economy has allowed agencies to avoid fuelling conflict by clearer and more precise targeting, so that any negative impact is as limited as possible.

Several participants felt that while agencies' language and strategies may change, their operations in the field do not. Moreover, many agencies do not do many of the things they say they do, and this includes taking a livelihoods approach. In reality, livelihoods approaches have a long way to go before they are mainstreamed, even in rural development for stable areas. It was also pointed out that there are a multitude of livelihoods approaches and it is highly contested which is the most appropriate or which will become the accepted model. It was recognised that there is a lot of piloting of livelihood approaches in development situations (FAO, CARE, DFID) and that it is important that this research should build on this work. WFP's Protracted Relief and Recovery Operations (PPRO) builds on the principles of livelihoods.

5. Proposed research issues

Kate Longley (Research Fellow, Rural Policy and Environment Group, ODI) and Sarah Collinson (Research Fellow, Humanitarian Policy Group, ODI) presented this section. The proposed research aims to promote enhanced support for rural livelihoods in SCPI in terms of policymaking, assessment strategies and aid programming. The core research issues include (i) the use of a livelihoods approach to understand what people do; (ii) incorporating a political economy approach into a livelihoods framework for a better analysis of the conflict; and (iii) assessing the feasibility of principled livelihoods support in order to operationalise a livelihoods approach in SCPI.

A political economy approach can potentially offer the broader, political perspective that livelihoods approaches have been criticised as lacking. There are various other complementarities between the two approaches. For example, political economy examines the question of who gains and who loses in a conflict situation: a livelihoods approach can help to explain how these people benefit or remain vulnerable. Political economy seeks to understand political and economic processes with particular emphasis on structures of power and inequality: livelihoods allows for a greater focus on social and cultural processes. By emphasising the nature of powerlessness, political economy challenges the view that vulnerability is determined solely by poverty: livelihoods approaches allow for a more detailed understanding of poverty by looking at resources or capital assets. A livelihoods approach aims to determine people's goals and allows them to express their livelihood preferences for achieving these goals: political economy examines incentives for peace and the potential effects of peace settlements, allowing for a greater understanding of whose livelihoods to support and how. Although both political economy and livelihoods approaches are very broad, it is also important to consider alternative conceptual approaches.

It is proposed that case studies in up to eight countries should be undertaken, using a research approach that describes local livelihoods, the expressed preferences of the poor, and the wider

power dynamics of political instability. The research will then examine how agencies are responding, looking first at projects implemented at grassroots level and then working up to the international level (including donor perspectives) to understand how specific interventions are actually designed and effected. Such an approach will then allow for the identification of opportunities and constraints for principled support to rural livelihoods.

Key research stages will include:
  i. Identification of case studies (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, DR Congo and Angola have already been identified under ODI's on-going research into the political economy of conflict);
 ii. Development of an analytical framework;
iii. Clarification of key research questions;
 iv. Detailed planning;
  v. Field visits, consultation and analysis;
 vi. Recommendations and follow-up.

Four main sets of research questions have been identified. These are:
(a) *How do livelihoods change in SCPI's?* How do people cope and adapt to SCPI? What happens to social capital? How are political and other capital assets affected? What is happening to natural resource use, agricultural, trade and market patterns? What are the implications of a livelihoods approach for aid interventions?
(b) *What is the wider political, economic and social context?* Who are the key actors and stakeholders? Who are the winners and losers? Why? How are actors' interests affected by aid? What are the wider economic and political processes affecting livelihoods?
(c) *How are agencies responding?* How do agencies formulate interventions? What have been the experiences of livelihoods approaches? Can a livelihoods approach usefully inform better aid responses? What are the constraints faced by agencies in adopting a livelihoods approach?
(d) *Can a livelihoods approach improve aid interventions?* What are the limitations of a livelihoods approach (enhanced by political economy perspectives) in SCPI? Can such a livelihoods approach enhance methods for needs assessment? What are the implications for aid programming? How might a livelihoods approach be put into practice in relation to donor and agency priorities?

6. Working groups: elaboration of research questions

After some questions and clarifications the participants divided into three groups, one each to discuss and raise further research issues relating to the first three research questions above. The groups reported back as follows:

Group A: How do livelihoods change in SCPI?

Livelihoods must be considered in relation to the characteristics of a particular SCPI, particularly in terms of its timing and duration, and its pervasiveness and reach. A typology of SCPI would be useful, e.g. that developed by Frances Stewart and others. A simple comparison between livelihoods in SCPI and livelihoods prior to the onset of political instability may not be possible without an understanding of the longer historical perspective. Longer-term processes (e.g. changes in trade patterns and marketing opportunities) can often have a profound impact on livelihoods: it is important that the effects of SCPI are not confused with the wider on-going dynamics of change.

There are multiple types and levels of actors to be taken into account. For example, petty traders, business entrepreneurs, farmers, pastoralists, etc. – a livelihood is generally made up of a combination of different subsistence and income-earning activities. It is important to consider actors

both within and beyond the household level (i.e. compound, village, community). Although a livelihoods approach is often based on the household, it is perhaps necessary to take the village as the starting point. The interaction between rural dwellers and town dwellers must also be considered. . In looking at IDPs, it is important to determine the effect of IDPs on the livelihoods of host communities. Differentiation and interactions between actors is key. Network analysis may be helpful in this respect.

An interesting question to be researched is how (i.e. at what point) local actors decide whether merely to 'survive' through the depletion of existing assets or to develop new livelihood strategies by building new assets. There are lessons to be learnt here from the existing literature on famine. Questions of sustainability may be inappropriate, e.g. refugee populations in a host country which doesn't want them to stay.

Much of the research into livelihood strategies can be gathered from existing documentation, project reports and on-going monitoring systems of operational agencies. For example, the Food Security Assessment Unit in Somalia has documented the livelihood strategies for different wealth classes in over 20 different 'food economy groups' (based on SCF's Household Economy Approach (HEA) approach). In Afghanistan, similar types of data are continuously collected by the WFP-Vulnerability Assessment Mapping (VAM) unit. In S. Sudan, the annual monitoring data collection exercises combine both HEA and VAM approaches.

In relation to the points raised above, aid responses must consider what would be the most appropriate entry point and at what level to intervene (e.g. household, compound, village, community). Aid interventions must seek to support the processes, institutions and policies that exist at different levels and play a role in allowing or promoting preferred livelihood strategies. Aid can be used either to support certain activities or to enhance the household/community asset base. The appropriate sequencing of aid must considered. The experience of Oxfam in the Philippines showed that livelihood strategies that existed prior to instability cannot simply be re-built. Changes resulting from SCPI may mean that entirely new livelihood patterns emerge and these emerging livelihood patterns may be difficult to identify.

Group B: What is the wider political, economic and social context?

It is important not to make a false dichotomy between context and livelihoods. The political economy of neglect means that due to interests of the powerful in valuable resources (for example, diamonds and oil in Angola) those from the local population tend to be left out of the picture to fend for themselves, with consequences for livelihoods. Value chain analysis can provide a means of assessing impact on livelihoods/context.

It must be recognised that there are multiple actors and multiple levels. Diverse actors are part of political economy in different contexts and there is a political economy of livelihood choices in SCPIs. The poorest are often both victims and perpetrators of natural resource degradation: the same may be true of conflict/violence.

Winners and losers are not always exclusive. The group felt there should maybe be a focus on 'critical connectors' rather than winners and losers, particularly since alliances between vulnerable and less vulnerable groups can serve purposes for both groups (cf. Goodhand's work in Sierra Leone). The group felt that an appropriate approach would be to look at actors and what connects them in order to understand why relationships form and what the most appropriate livelihood support strategies would be. Accountability and accessibility were recurring themes: Is there really

any downward accountability to beneficiaries of humanitarian aid? Do groups understand/ conceptualise their rights?

The group recognised there are many grey areas where violence is a key part of supporting livelihoods. Efforts to promote livelihood diversification towards non-violent livelihoods require detailed context-specific analysis. The very different nature of conflicts in different countries needs to be taken into account when choosing contexts for comparison in a multicountry study: e.g. SCPIs with strong and weak states require different approaches. The wider historical perspective and political affiliations over time also need to be considered. Research in contexts like Colombia would need to be done with partners and local researchers embedded in the local context rather than outsiders.

Should donors be included as actors relevant to conflict?
Cases discussed: DRC, Angola, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Colombia, S Ethiopia, Liberia.

Group C: How are agencies responding?

The group re-phrased the questions under discussion:
1) To what extent do agencies use elements of the proposed framework in formulating their interventions? The group questioned how widespread the use of livelihoods approaches was in reality. However, it was felt that many programmes may contain elements of a livelihoods approach.
2) What have been the experiences/impact of livelihood approaches? Concern was expressed that most programmes using a livelihoods approach would be relatively recent and therefore it may be too early to see what their impact has been.
3) To what extent is this livelihood approach useful? Why is practice different from what is preached (at headquarter level)? It was felt that what is talked about at headquarter level and what is actually done at field level are frequently very different. It was thought there were several possible reasons for this:
    - Good, innovative practice at field level may simply not be documented due to lack of time or resources and therefore headquarter is unaware and lessons do not get learnt.
    - Approaches adopted at the theoretical level may not have been put into practical 'how to do' guidelines and therefore remain inaccessible to the field.
    - Approaches adopted at headquarter by policy and management people may have practical implications for implementation (particularly in SCPI) which mean they cannot be put into practice in the field.

The group then looked at methodology. Formal implementation of livelihoods approaches is still in its very early stages; this may present problems in impact assessment/evaluation. It was suggested that to maintain some continuity there should be a focus on limited number of agencies for the proposed research. There then needs to be a formulation of a proposed framework combining livelihoods and political economy approaches, and case studies selected to test the reality on ground against the proposed framework. It was felt that some action research to test the proposed framework with partners would be appropriate for two reasons: firstly to get over the difficulty of finding programmes which are actually fully using a livelihoods approach; and secondly since it would be difficult to find any programmes which had been running for any significant length of time.

General comments

Some general comments were made in the plenary session following the feedback from the working groups. It was noted that:

- To have a buy-in from agencies another round of meetings may be needed to agree the research framework and approach.
- To evaluate livelihood-based interventions, a clear agreement is needed with agencies on what specifically is being evaluated.
- Need to look at how agencies and donors change their behaviour. What gets preached at headquarter and what happens on the ground and vice-versa needs to be looked at.
- This is an opportunity to assist agencies by collaborating with them.
- Must be clear about what outputs the research project is aiming for – training materials, good practice review, practical things.

Summary

Karim Hussein (Research Fellow, Rural Policy and Environment Group, ODI) summarised the group session and emphasised that there is a need to be clear on how to involve agencies in the research programme. There is also more effort needed in generating a conceptual approach or a research hypothesis. From the workshop the ODI team have distilled the following questions / issues to be considered in designing the research project:

1. A pilot research stage is needed to develop a conceptual approach that incorporates the issues highlighted in the overview document and also those raised at the workshop.
2. Need to be clear on how the proposed research supports poverty reduction objectives.
3. In defining SCPI it is necessary to include SCPI at sub-national levels in countries that are otherwise considered to be politically stable, e.g. Uganda.
4. It is important to continue to draw on different disciplines and approaches, beyond livelihoods and political economy.
5. There are key points to be learned from responding to famine and natural disasters.
6. Need to address how livelihoods support can be provided within humanitarian principles; this can usefully inform a critical approach to capacity-building in SCPI contexts.
7. Supporting livelihoods in certain long-term refugee contexts may offer an interesting case study.

6. Action Plan

Kate Longley detailed the proposed action plan

- Workshop report;
- Follow-up consultations with donors and collaborators to clarify expectations and research outputs;
- Development of detailed research proposal(s) with collaborating agencies. This will include initial field visit / pilot study;
- Secure three-year funding;
- Detailed research and analysis;
- Ongoing discussion and analysis.

ODI stressed that they aim to move to the next step as soon as possible and requested indications of interest in collaboration.

Simon Maxwell closed the workshop with grateful thanks to DFID for funding the work to date and to all participants for their time and interest.

Supporting Livelihoods in Situations of Chronic Political Instability

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